

**By the Grace of
the Gods:
Volume 6**

Roy

VISIT...

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By the Grace of the Gods



6

Roy

Illust. Ririnra

By the Grace of the Gods



6
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Illust. Ririnra

A young man with dark brown hair and large, expressive brown eyes is looking upwards with a nervous expression, a small sweat drop on his forehead. He is wearing a dark blue tunic with a red scarf and a red gauntlet on his right arm. The background is a dimly lit, ornate interior with a large white lamp and a wooden structure.

Ryoma
needs to
prepare to
visit the
Jami family's
home. But is
the hurdle
for his first
time buying
formal wear
in his new
world too
high?!





“Neat!
I’ve heard
about you,
but I didn’t
believe you’d
actually
come when
summoned.”

Kiriluel

One was
a kindly
middle-aged
woman who
looked refined,
like a noble.
The other was
a warrior, both
beautiful and
wild. The two
contrasting
goddesses
were sitting at
a table and
drinking tea.

“Oh my, a
new guest?
Welcome.
We’ll need
more tea
and snacks.”

Wilieris

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Illustrator: Ririnra

Chapter 4 Episode 12: Procuring Food

It was the second day of training at the Poison Bug Plains. We took turns instructing the students, so we had free time until our turn came around. I had already secured shelter, so the next step was to acquire food and water. To collect them, I carried a leather bag and gloves with me.

“See you later,” I told Roche before I left.

“Careful out there.”

I walked a short way to some nearby woods. I guessed that it was in order to teach the students about the importance of doing research before a mission, but prior knowledge had a significant effect on the difficulty of camping in this territory. The pamphlet I had bought had everything from general tips on what to watch out for to the locations of rivers and edible plants. Anyone who memorized the contents of that pamphlet could most likely survive out here whether they were used to camping or not.

I walked along the road until I got the feeling that I was being watched. I looked around until I found a student. They didn’t seem to need anything from me; it was more that I just happened to enter their field of vision. When I looked at the student, he nodded to me once, then began to march across the plains. Maybe he had a job to do, or maybe he was searching for food like I was. I didn’t know for sure, but I did come across a few students heading off to the plains like this. I just prayed that they wouldn’t hurt themselves.

I got to the woods and quickly found some red parasol mushrooms, an edible fungus whose appearance matched their name. Despite the bright red color, they weren’t poisonous. They had a fragrant scent and a savory flavor. Finding those so soon seemed like a good omen. Behind the tree next to these, there grew some enoku mushrooms. Beneath them, a thorny fungus called a spear cluster was jutting from the ground. Both were edible. If I made a stew using these, it would almost certainly be delectable.

Autumn had arrived in this country, and that seemed to be mushroom season here, just how it was in the Forest of Gana. There was always an increase in fungus there around autumn, so I got to enjoy a variety of mushrooms every year. I wanted to pick a decent number of them to have a feast with. I could just prioritize using the

ones that would spoil quickly, and if any were left over, I could dry them and take them back home with me. Then I could ask Chelma to cook something with them for lunch at the laundromat.

This country didn't have the technology for artificially cultivating mushrooms yet, so when people wanted them, they either went out and picked them in the wild or bought ones picked by others; this meant that the harvestable amount was entirely dependent on timing. The weather and season controlled the availability of mushrooms, even for wild animals searching for food. Much like how dried shiitake mushrooms were a luxury product in Japan up until about the Edo period, mushrooms were fairly expensive in this country. Getting to find a wide variety on your own and eat them fresh was a privilege enjoyed solely by hunters or adventurers. Not only were they good to eat on their own, but they could be used for soup stock. If only they could be easily purchased all year round...

Actually, I could try growing some myself. There are two cultivation methods for mushrooms; the outdoor log technique, and the indoor tray technique. The former involves growing the fungus on wood in natural conditions. The latter grows them from a mix of sawdust and nutrients or the like, from what I could recall. I didn't know the necessary temperature, or moisture, or anything else, but I knew the general methodology. It would be worth a try.

Even if I didn't know the exact details, simply knowing the basic idea could have made it highly possible. But I'd heard stories of people who blew all their money trying to cultivate mushrooms for profit and failing, so I needed to be cautious. I could just try it for fun and consider myself lucky if I got it right. Not right now, though. Finding food was the top priority.

"Anything here?"

"What about over there?"

"Nothing. How about there?"

"Can't find a thing."

I heard children's voices through the trees. It sounded like they were looking for something. Curious, I sneaked toward them and found that they were the four boys who argued with Beck's party on the first day.

"Guess we should've gone to the plains."

"Rock lizards camouflage themselves as rocks, y'know. There's nothing but trees and grass around here—I don't see any rocks."

Rock lizards weren't even listed in the pamphlet I bought. That meant these boys had picked a job that was impossible to complete; a trap set for students who didn't do their research. There wouldn't be a penalty for it, but it would be pointed out as a mistake that the guildmaster intended for them to learn from.

In any case, I decided to get away from them. If they happened to notice me and ask for my opinion, that would be annoying. I hid behind the trees and slipped away.



Around an hour passed.

“I’m back!”

“Welcome!”

“Welcome back.”

When I left my things at my base and announced my return, the teachers waiting on standby greeted me.

“There was a ton to eat in those woods. It’s pretty easy to find food out there.”

“Neat. Maybe we won’t have kids whining about running out of food this time, then.”

“How often does that happen, Lucy?”

“There tend to be a lot of kids who are new to things like this. Sometimes they don’t bring enough food, and sometimes their food ends up spoiling for one reason or another. As long as we’re in a region where food is available, we can just teach them how to find it. It should be fine.”

“That makes sense. How have the students been doing, by the way? I saw some of them in the woods.”

“They’re all doing pretty much the same thing.”

“They’re off in the woods or the plains doing their job or looking for food. We basically have nothing to do but look after the horses.”

“Makes for an easy job, but it gets boring. Haha.”

All of the students were away, apparently. At least they were enthusiastic.

“Also, while I was in the woods, I thought of something.”

“What?”

“There seem to be a lot of mushrooms there. Some are edible, but there are a lot of poisonous ones too, and it could be hard to tell which is which.”

It was common sense not to put weird mushrooms in your mouth, and the students were warned, but it was possible that some could accidentally eat poisonous ones, thinking they were food.

“Sounds like we should keep an eye on what they find.”

“Yes, I think that would be for the best. I brought a lot of medicine along, so if you ever need any, just tell me. Depending on the type of poison, I could also create an antidote from materials in the woods.”

“Got it, I’ll tell you if anything happens.”

“See you later, then.”

I needed to tend to the food and water I gathered. I started with the water. There was a river in the woods just as the pamphlet said, so it wasn't difficult to find, but the quality of that water was a problem. It wasn't especially clean, so I wanted to filter it.

Outside my fumigated shelter, I gathered some dirt. I used earth magic on it to produce sand, gravel, and a tank that looked like a cylinder on top of a big funnel. Next, I carried them to my shelter, then took some cloth and crushed charcoal out of my Item Box. I laid the cloth out inside the tank, then added a layer of charcoal, another cloth, a layer of sand, another cloth, a layer of gravel, and yet another cloth. I could pour water through here to filter out the filth.

Lastly, I left the tank in a corner of the room on top of a cloth to soak up any water that leaked out. My makeshift water purifier was complete. I had a big jug that I could use to scoop up the river water. Now, if I just filtered and boiled it as necessary, I could get safe drinking water. I tested it out by pouring some water into the tank.

As the water was being filtered, I used the leftover gravel and cloth to do another job. I molded the gravel with magic to make a big, flat, shallow planter, then filled it with scavenger slime compost. I turned some leftover gravel back into dirt and mixed it with the compost, finishing the preparations in no time.

I took out some sesame seed-sized beans that I'd collected in the woods and scattered them around in the planter, made clean water with water magic to moisturize it all, and covered it with a cloth to protect it from light. Next, I used wood magic to force the beans to sprout. They rapidly grew, the white of the sprouts rising in the darkness. When I removed the cloth, the sunlight from the window illuminated the thin, white surface of the bean sprouts. I harvested what I needed for tonight, then left the rest to grow further.

These plants grew as fast as weeds, so by using a combination of fertilizer and magic, I could immediately produce more beans. And by harvesting those beans, I'd be able to keep producing bean sprouts for days to come. I got a lot of use out of this food back in the Forest of Gana, so this brought back some memories.

Speaking of nostalgic food, I also found some grainspear grass, a plant resembling zebra grass that grew near river shores. Once fully grown, they were long and sharp with many small seeds attached to their tips. Depending on what perspective you viewed them from, the stalks could look like spears. They were classified as grains much like rice and wheat, and when made into a powder, they could be baked into something like unfermented bread. But while it was edible, it didn't taste good, so the general public viewed the plant as a worthless weed. Just about nobody ate grainspear grass as part of their regular diet. Outside of wildlife survival situations, most would

probably just eat bread made from wheat.

In any case, I had various mushrooms, bean sprouts, and grainspear grass. I picked an assortment of other plants as well, including some that could be preserved or used as seasoning. It looked like I would be safe tonight when it came to food.

Chapter 4 Episode 13: Jobs and Reputation

“Did you get it?”

“Of course!”

“Oh?”

The students seemed to be returning, so the whole campground got noisier. I looked out my window and saw a crowd gathered next to the carriages, presumably so the students’ food could be checked. We did talk about checking their food more closely, but since they all came back at once, it appeared to be taking a while. It was still a bit before my time in the schedule, but I decided to go out and get to work.

“Hello, everyone! I’ll help!”

“Thanks!”

“Help check on the food!”

“Got it! Next person in line, I can check your food over here!”

The next student in line walked up to me.

“Take a look, please.”

“Right, understood. You sure got a lot of food.”

I set the student’s bag on the luggage rack on the carriage and looked inside. This student seemed to know a fair bit about plants. He mostly took tree sprouts and edible wild grass. But there was one problem.

“Most of this is fine, but not these mushrooms.”

“What?!”

“They look like red parasol mushrooms, which are edible, but compare the underside of the cap to the real thing. I have an example right here.”

“Oh, it looks different.”

“Right. When the underside of the cap is the same clean shade of red, that’s a red parasol mushroom, which you can eat. When it’s a darker, almost brown color, that’s a crimson parasol mushroom, which is poisonous. First, this would give you a stomachache, then it would induce diarrhea, vomiting, and dizziness. You have to be careful.”

“That’s good to know.”

“Anyway, I’ll be taking this. But it looks like the rest of what you collected is perfectly edible, so I think you did well.”

“Thank you.”

“No problem. Next!”

“Yo.”

This next student also seemed to know which plants were edible and which weren't, but he did a poor job picking those plants. His tree sprouts could be eaten, but he should only have picked the terminal bud, the part at the end of the stem. Picking the other buds next to it meant more food for him for now, but it would leave less food to collect next year.

The trees these buds came from were also weak and easily broken unless they were handled with care. His bag actually contained axillary buds with the branches still attached. Some rural villages, depending on their location, would sometimes expand into forests out of a need for food. When such places harvested food like this, it could lead to trouble down the line.

I explained these problems to the student and warned him for next time. The next student who approached me brought something other than plants.

“Excuse me, but can you teach me how to prepare this?”

“I think you should talk to him when it comes to animals.”

I told the student about an adventurer behind the carriage and had him go over there. I was only in charge of plants and fungus.

“First thing you need to do with animals is drain the blood. Got that?”

“Yes!”

“But make sure to do this in as safe a place as possible. The smell of blood could attract monsters. Don't worry about it too much right now, but in general you should drain the blood away from the campsite.”

“What if that's the only place I can do it?”

“Then dig a hole and bury the blood and any unnecessary parts of the animal. Better than nothing. If it wouldn't weigh you down too much, I'd recommend buying some of this to bring with you. It's Bamboo Forest's deodorizing fluid.” I wasn't expecting to hear one of my products being advertised out in the wild, but there it was.

“Deodorizing fluid?”

“Haven't heard of it? There's this store called Bamboo Forest that opened this year, where you can get laundry done for cheap. They sell it there. The stronger stuff can even wash the stench of goblin blood out of your armor, so it's pretty handy. I hear there are some beastkin that can't get enough of the stuff. You can only get it in Gimul or Lenaf right now, though.”

I had no idea it was even being used for camping, and I was the one selling the stuff.

“Next! Wait, huh?”

That was apparently the last person, because there was nobody left in line.

“Ryoma, are you done over there?”

“I think so, Mimir.”

“Then can you gather together all the inedible stuff you took? I’d like to dispose of it.”

“Got it. Actually, can I keep the poison mushrooms?”

“I was just going to throw them out, so I don’t mind, but what for? Oh, you feeding them to your slimes?”

“Right. They might be poisonous to humans, but they’re perfect for poison slimes.”

“Well, be my guest. Just don’t eat them by mistake.”

“Thank you!”

With her permission, I cleaned up after myself and collected the inedible goods from the other teachers as well. I also spoke with the man who taught about draining blood and got him to give me some. Then I returned to my shelter, placed the poisonous mushrooms in my Dimension Home, grabbed the bottles containing my bloody slimes, and returned to the animal dissection site. Animal carcasses were being dangled above wooden tubs to let the blood out.

“So we don’t really have to do anything, right?” the man asked.

“Right. I’ll put my slimes in the tubs, so just allow the blood to be drained like you normally would,” I explained, pouring three bloody slimes into each of the three big tubs. I had been slowly gaining more bloody slimes, but had yet to reach the double digits; I hoped that I could make them multiply faster. But once they were in the tubs, it was hard to tell them apart from the pool of blood.

“Ryoma!”

“Yes?! What could that be? I’m sorry, I’ll be back soon.”

Someone seemed to be calling for me, so I hurried to the other side of the carriages.

“Oh, there you are!”

“Sorry I kept you waiting.”

A female teacher and a young boy were there, waiting for me.

“Is something wrong?”

“The medicine I bought doesn’t work,” the boy said.

“I think he might’ve been duped into buying fake medicine, but I don’t know enough to say for sure. You said you know a lot about medicine, right?” the woman asked.

“I know a decent amount, but can you show me the medicine?”

If he’d bought the medicine at a regular store, there’s no reason it would be fake. Making fake medicine was legal in this country, but selling it was not. And if it would do harm to the user, that was an even more serious crime. That meant the cause was probably

something else.

“Here you go. It was a little expensive, but the drug store said it works well, so I blew a lot of money on it.”

“Let me take a look.”

As the boy scratched himself through his clothes, he handed me a bottle. Taking a look inside, I had a good idea as to what happened.

“When did you first use this, and how many times did you use it?”

“I started using it this morning, but it didn’t work, so I put more on. About five times, I think.”

“I see. This medicine isn’t fake, it’s just gone bad.”

“It’s gone bad?”

“Did you leave the bottle out in the sun? This is definitely insect repellent made with somewhat expensive ingredients, but it doesn’t last in sunlight. You have to store it somewhere away from the sun for it to keep well. And if you have sensitive skin or use it too much, it can damage your skin, so that itching may not just be caused by bugs. Did they tell you any of this when you bought it?”

“No, they didn’t!”

Either they really didn’t explain how it worked, or he just wasn’t listening. I didn’t know, but the medicine was the real McCoy, at least.

“Thanks for explaining,” the woman said. “I can handle the rest here.”

“Thank you, please do.”

“Excuse me!” someone else cried.

“I’ll be right there!”

A lot of people had questions for me.



I didn’t expect to be needed much, based on my experience on the first day, but I was surprisingly busy. I spent an hour answering questions to the extent I was able and trying to offer some guidance. Winter was getting closer, so the sun was setting early lately. Most of the students seemed to have returned to camp, so the barrage of questions was dying down.

“Ryoma, have a moment?”

“What is it, Roche?”

“Some students aren’t back yet. The four kids who raised a ruckus on the first day, to be exact. You seen them?”

“Those four? I saw them in the woods a while ago. They were hunting for a monster for their job, but I haven’t seen them since then. I don’t think they’ve been here, at least.”

“Huh, guess I’ll take a look around there then. The woods, right?”

“That’s where I saw them, yes. But can I tell you something else?”

“Hm?”

“It sounded like the job they took was a trap. They were talking about how they couldn’t find a rock lizard in the woods, so they were going to search the plains instead. They might not be in the woods anymore.”

“Yeah? Then I can send someone there too. Wait, never mind. Looks like that won’t be necessary.”

Before I could ask why Roche had taken back what he said, his thick finger pointed to something behind me.

“I see.”

There I saw the four boys walking toward us. They looked a bit worn out, but not hurt. Either they were tired, or they were weighed down by their prey.

“You’re late!”

“Sorry!”

“Hunting took a while.”

“But we got a big haul!”

“Take a look at this!”

Each of the four boys presented their kills to Roche.

“Grass rats? Eight of them?”

“Yep.”

“Hunting’s our specialty.”

“Soon as we found their nest, it was simple!”

“Hey, stupid! Sorry.”

When they saw me, they got as docile as a cat staying at someone else’s house for some reason.

“Uh, did I do something?” I asked.

“You’re the boss of Bamboo Forest, aren’t you?” the most carefree of the boys said.

“Yes, but what does that have to do with anything?”

“Your store’s been good to people from the slums like us, so we’ve been told not to bug anyone associated with the place.”

“Told by who?”

“The adults from the slums. We’re poor, y’know. Even if we don’t do anything wrong, there are stores that don’t want us around. Not that they show it, but they act nasty to us. When that happens, we all find out real quick. Not like we want to cause trouble or anything either, but it’d suck if anything happened, so they tell the kids to stay away. And for stores that are nice to us like yours, they tell us not to bug you, like I said.” Their reputation was shared between all of them, apparently.

“We heard a while ago about how you’re a kid, and how you beat up bad adventurers and criminals and turned them over to the guards. But we never knew what you looked like. After what happened yesterday, we found out that you were that boss, which kinda freaked

these guys out. They thought the adults would get mad at them, or that you'd beat them up yourself."

"I wasn't freaked out!"

"We just wanted to explain ourselves."

"Yeah, that."

The boy's allies argued with him as he explained the situation. He was grinning.

"I understand now, but I wasn't really bothered by what happened yesterday. And even if I didn't like you that much, it'd be no reason to beat you up or anything. Unless you were here to kill me, that'd be another story."

"See? That's what I told them. If you were that bad, they'd tell the adults to stay away from you too. Oh, my name's Gazelle, by the way. Nice to meet you!"

"It's nice to meet you too."

He seemed like a nice boy. I heard that these boys often fought with Beck's party, but they didn't come across as that malicious. They were kind of charming, if anything. I thought it was nice to see kids with that much energy, personally.

"Oh, right. We wanna dissect our kills. Is there somewhere we're supposed to do that?"

"Behind that carriage over there."

"Thanks! We'll go take care of these, then. Let's go, guys!"

Gazelle and his allies went behind the carriage.

"He sure was lively."

"Right? Brightens up any party to have a member like that. Well, too much energy can be a liability, though. You were there yesterday when things went down, right? I talked to them, and they weren't bad kids, but they're just too rowdy. I'm sure that when you were young —" Roche said, then cut himself off.

"What's wrong?"

"Well, you're still around ten or so, so what am I saying? Just doesn't feel like I'm talking to a kid unless I'm looking right at you. You act like you're a lot older."

"I hear that a lot." There was a middle-aged man inside of me, after all. Mentally, we were probably about the same age. "By the way, Roche, those kids said they'd heard about me before."

"You're the youngest teacher here; younger than some of the students. When you're that young, and you're out there building what's almost a house to camp in, of course you're going to stand out. Makes sense that they would've heard about you from somebody. Most of the students only just registered, but a lot of the teachers participated in the goblin-slaying job. You took down groups of unruly adventurers and goblins, and you own a store where you fight off

robbers yourself... With all that you've done, even the newbies might've heard at least one story about you."

"True, I've been pretty prolific. And word's gotten around that I'm the person from those rumors?"

"Guess so. At least that means you're being taken seriously, eh?"

"Maybe." I didn't quite know if it was good or bad, but they acknowledged I was pretty powerful, apparently.

In any case, now we knew that all the students were safe. Under the starry sky, the students' bonfires flickered in the campsite as they cooked dinner or tried to keep warm in the chilly wind. I looked at their smiles as they sat around the fires and felt my mood lighten.

"Whoa!"

"What?!"

But then, there just had to be trouble. The silence of the campground was suddenly broken by a scream.

Chapter 4 Episode 14: Trouble Arises

“What’s wrong?!”

I followed Roche to the animal dissection space behind the carriage and found it in chaos.

“What happened? Is anyone hurt?”

“I just started extracting some blood, but the blood in the bucket started to go wild. These guys were just startled, nobody was hurt or anything. But seriously, what the heck? Did an animal fall in there or something?”

“Oh, I had slimes in there, but that’s still strange. I wonder what’s wrong with it?”

I got the sense that my bloody slimes were panicking about something. There was nothing around that seemed like a threat, but I was still nervous.

“Gazelle, where’s the creature whose blood you were draining?!”

“That one all the way at the end there.”

I cast Appraisal on the flesh dangling from the tree.

Grass Rat Corpse

A herbivorous rodent. Its meat is fresh but contaminated with poison. If this poison is ingested orally, it’s harmless as long as there are no open wounds in the mouth. It can be eaten if necessary.

“I knew it. This meat is poisoned.”

“Poisoned?!”

“We didn’t use any poison!” one of Gazelle’s allies said, but my magic proved there was poison in the meat. That being said, he probably wasn’t lying. That meant the poison must have come from somewhere else, and I thought I knew where.

“Here we are,” I said. Blood and fur obscured two small holes between the rat’s front legs. “That’s a snake bite. A venomous snake probably attacked the rat before you captured it.”

It must have only barely survived the bite, but as it was hiding in its den, Gazelle’s party caught it while the poison still remained in its blood. Then that blood was drained into the bucket containing my slimes. Maybe they had started thrashing around in an attempt to avoid the poisonous blood.

“Oh? They’ve gone quiet.”

“Looks like the bloody slimes absorbed all the blood and poison.”

“Will it be alright?! Does it need medicine or something?!”

If it was a venomous snake that lived in this area whose venom was safe when ingested orally, it had to be a bush snake. I did have medicine for that, but it was meant to be drunk by humans. It wasn't meant to be injected directly into the blood.

The first thing I wanted to do was dilute the poison as much as possible. I collected my bloody slimes from the other buckets and gathered up as much of the blood as possible.

“There were seven more grass rats, right? Sorry, but as there doesn't seem to be any poison in them, would you mind giving me their blood? It has nothing to do with the training, so you don't have to do it, but I'll pay you.”

“It's our mistake that caused this, no need to pay us. Right, guys?”

“Oh, yeah. Not like we need all that blood.”

“We'd just throw it out anyway.”

“Thanks!”

I quickly checked the other seven rats, then poured their blood into the bucket.

“Hopefully this'll thin out the poison a bit. And if it doesn't, it'll still be nutrients for the bloody slimes.”

The bloody slimes were suffering, but I wouldn't say they were in danger. The bush snake poison was weak, and the bloody slimes had resistance to poison. Not as strong as a poison slime's, but it could handle some types of poison.

I decided to watch for a while and see how diluting the poison and providing nutrients helped it. Trying medicine that had never been tested on a slime before would be a last resort.

“Now to let it rest for a while. Thanks, Gazelle.”

“Thanks? We didn't do much of anything.”

“Just giving me the blood was helpful enough. I'm partially to blame for not being cautious enough myself, so you shouldn't feel bad. And neither should the rest of you.”

The other three boys were nice enough to respond, but sounded uncomfortable.

Roche went behind them and patted them on the back. “Might be hard not to feel bad, but feeling bad won't change anything. Instead of just getting depressed, try to reflect on your mistakes so you can do better next time. You agree, right, Ryoma?”

“Right.” Thankfully this poison was safe to ingest orally anyway, but they could have eaten the meat without knowing it was poisoned at all. If it happened to be dangerous to digest, that would have spelled their doom.

“Listen, when people start getting used to something, they slack

off and make more mistakes. For adventurers, those mistakes can be lethal. I know hunting's your specialty, but take this opportunity to brush up on the fundamentals."

"Okay!" the kids said.

"Then get back to work. Ryoma, I don't know much about curing slimes, but tell me if there's anything I can do. I'll help however I can."

"Us too!"

If I needed something, I decided to ask Roche or Gazelle's party first.





It was early next morning, before the sun had even risen.

“Oh, time for the next shift?”

“Yeah.”

“Thanks. I’ll swap out, then.”

I was holding a pot containing my bloody slimes under one arm, keeping an eye on it as I got my work done. Eventually, the team for the next shift gathered around.

“I heard your slimes consumed poison. How are they?”

“They’ve calmed down quite a lot, thank you.”

I was on guard duty, but all the teachers and students who knew the situation were pretty accommodating to make it easier to care for my slimes. So while I was technically on guard duty, I was permitted to hunt for animals near the campsite and give their blood to the bloody slimes. Thanks to that, they seemed to have gotten past the worst of the poisoning. They were still in a weakened state, but no longer seemed to be in pain like they were immediately after consuming the poison. Their recovery was even faster than I expected.

“That’s good.”

“Yes, thank you for the help, everyone.”

“So you’re really accompanied by slimes, Ryoma?”

I didn’t understand the question. I would have guessed he was wondering why I kept such weak monsters with me, but judging by his tone of voice, that didn’t seem to be the case.

“What, do you not know what people call you?”

“When you talk about the Adventurer Accompanied By Slimes, everyone in Gimul would know who you’re talking about lately, I think.”

“Really?” I asked.

“You’re pretty famous for your work at the abandoned mine and the weird shop you’ve got.”

“There probably aren’t as many people who know your name and face, though. At first, I didn’t know it was you either. But when people see your slimes, I think they can figure it out pretty quickly.”

I didn’t even realize I’d gotten so famous around town. It made me feel kind of awkward, so I decided to end the conversation there to get some rest.

“Well, there’s still tomorrow. Or later today, technically.”

“Go get some sleep.”

“Good night.”

I returned to my base, but I was so concerned about the health of my bloody slimes that I didn’t feel the least bit sleepy. They were in a

stable condition, so there shouldn't have been anything to worry about, but it had been a while since any of my non-poison slimes consumed poison. I fed poison grass to my slimes for my evolution experiments back in the day, but I let individual slimes pick out the food they liked, so they mostly just evolved without being harmed. This was the first time I'd given poison to a slime since the time I figured that out.

That brought something to mind for me, so I cast Monster Appraisal on one of the bloody slimes that drank the poison.

Bloody Slime

Skills: Suck Blood 5, Deodorize 3, Disease Resistance 3, Poison Resistance 2, Play Dead 10, Consume 2, Absorb 4, Split 1

Its Suck Blood and Poison Resistance levels had increased by one. The former was a result of all the blood I had fed it, but for the latter, I was pretty sure that I hadn't fed it anything poisonous until now. There were no changes to its Disease Resistance level. Maybe it just stayed the same because its level was relatively high anyway, but there was something mixed into the blood I fed it. But that couldn't have been, because I only ever fed it fresh blood I got myself or blood that was handled by Sieg's butcher shop. If that wasn't the cause, then I had to assume that its Poison Resistance level went up by one because of this recent incident. It was currently in a stable condition, and its Poison Resistance Level had increased.

I didn't expect it to conquer the poison so quickly. The Poison Resistance skill was a physical attribute, rather than a technical skill like sword or spear skills, and it was cultivated through changes in its physical constitution and through experiences the way the Disease Resistance skill was. It seemed like it might function something like an immune system. If so, then maybe Poison Resistance was like antibodies.

It seemed absurd that it could have developed that in one night though, unless that's just how slimes were. The first slimes were designed to be adaptable to environments and able to easily reproduce according to Gain, creator of slimes and this world itself. It was extremely unlikely that he was mistaken. Bloody slimes shared that adaptability, so maybe they could adapt to poison well enough to survive after a single night. I couldn't be sure, though.

But it occurred to me that if all this was true, then maybe I could create an antiserum. It seemed like I might be able to check whether slimes had antibodies. I took a piece of a poisoned bloody slime's body to use as a sample. Just as I could collect acid, poison, and deodorizing fluid, I could collect the bloody slime's blood too. When

normal slimes died, they disappeared without a trace, but evolved slimes seemed to take on the physical properties of the food they consumed. Anyway, this was no time to think about that.

For now, I needed the serum in the blood, so I used alchemy to separate it out. I could have made it separate just by letting it sit for a while, but I wanted to know the results as soon as possible. I cast Appraisal on the orange fluid that remained in the container.

Serum

Extracted from a bloody slime's fluid by using alchemy. It contains antibodies that resist bush snake venom.

I had proven that the bloody slime serum contained antibodies. I still couldn't guess exactly how adaptable the bloody slime was, but this answered one question. There was an antidote for bush snake venom that worked on humans, but not all poisons had antidotes. Even with the realm of snake venom alone, the composition of the venom differed by species, and even between child and adult within the same species. There were too many incurable poisons to count. I needed to investigate whether this serum could be given to humans as an antiserum and if it was safe. But on Earth, they administered antigens to horses and used serums made from their blood to treat diphtheria, so it wasn't impossible. Best of all, this serum didn't cost anything to make. I also needed to think about how to preserve this in case of emergencies, but depending on the type of poison, I could make the serum quickly enough on the spot as long as I had the antibodies ready. If I obtained more bloody slimes in the future, then I could produce that much more serum too. It would be well worth preparing for such an eventuality just in case.

But while I made use of a lot of my knowledge from Earth already, the invention of serums had a huge influence on the study of medicine on Earth. This was one time where I had to proceed with caution. I decided to conduct my research on serums in secret.

Chapter 4 Episode 15: Harvest

“This is one big find,” I said with a chuckle.

By creating antibodies against poison, my bloody slimes’ Poison Resistance level had increased. Wondering what that meant for their Disease Resistance level, I looked into it and found that they had antibodies against pathogens as well, more than they did for poisons. It looked possible to use bloody slime serums to cure both poisons and diseases.

I took out my watch and realized that it was just two minutes before when we were supposed to gather in the morning. I quickly put some bug repellent on, then rushed out of my Dimension Home and toward the carriages. I swore that once I returned home, I’d ask Dinome to develop an alarm clock.

I kept running until I saw the students. Many of them had already gathered. I went around the group of students and headed to the teachers past them.

“Yo, Ryoma. Perfect timing.”

“I’m sorry, Roche. My slimes distracted me.”

“Yeah? How’d things go?”

“Everything worked out, thankfully.”

“Really?! That’s great to hear.”

“Sorry about all the commotion, everyone!”

Thankfully the meeting place was close to the campsite, so I narrowly managed to avoid being late. It seemed that everyone there had heard about what happened last night. Everyone was listening, so I used the opportunity to report how the incident concluded.

“Time to start the morning assembly, then. Attention, everyone! How was your first night in Poison Bug Plains?”

“I’m itchy!”

“I couldn’t get any sleep.”

Most of the students suffered from bug bites. The main purpose of the morning assembly was to perform a roll-call and confirm everyone’s safety, so we didn’t spend too much time on it.

“For those of you who got bitten, you probably weren’t taking enough preventative measures. After you’ve been treated to the best of our abilities, check on your tools and make sure you’re using them right! We’ll be camping here two more times. If you don’t get it together, you’re gonna have a bad time! Again, you’re free to ask the

teachers any questions! That is all. Dismissed!"

The students began to walk to the tents or the teachers, whereas Roche came toward me. "Ryoma, I need to talk to you about something," he said. "A few of the teachers have gotten questions about fighting styles and weapons. This isn't part of the schedule, but we were thinking about holding mock battles between the teachers to help explain things to the students. Would you mind joining in and fighting with a bow?"

"That's fine with me, but does it have to be a bow?"

"I won't say you have to. Everyone's got their own fighting styles. But ideally, we can show off a wide variety of weapons and styles. Most of the teachers here primarily use close combat, so it'd be great if you could use a ranged weapon. I hear you shot a bird out of the sky during night watch duty."

I guess he heard that from one of the other people on guard duty. I needed blood for my bloody slimes, so I shot down a nocturnal bird I happened to see.

"If you've got skills like that, I think you could teach the students something. Can you do that for us?"

"I'd be happy to," I said. It sounded like he wouldn't mind if I said no, but I was here as a teacher. Helping the students to learn better was my duty. "For the mock battle, I'll make arrows without arrowheads."

"Yeah?! Then I'll go tell the others. Talk to you later. Can't keep the students waiting," Roche said and began to walk off, but when I was about to go make arrows, I heard someone step in the grass behind me. I turned around to see who it was.

"Beck?"

"Yo."

Beck was seldom seen without his allies, but he was standing there alone. He wasn't talking to anyone, just looking at me. As Roche left, Beck came forward in his place like he needed something.

"I tried to be careful, but bugs got into my tent anyway. I just wanted to ask if you know any good ways to prevent that," he said. I never saw him timid before, but today he was acting awkward. It reminded me of Tabuchi, my old subordinate.

"Bugs got in, huh? Even if you've got solid countermeasures in place, they'll often come in at the same time people are entering. Check if they're on your clothes or shoes before you go inside. Also, should I teach you how to make a simple bug repellent? All you have to do is crush up some medicinal herbs that you can find around here. If you smear that on the entrance to your tent, it should keep flying bugs away too."

"Oh, I see. Can you do that?"

Thus, Beck and I went out to the plains.

“Is this a good spot? We didn’t walk that far.”

“As long as it’s in direct sunlight, the herbs will grow anywhere in the plains,” I explained. Honestly, we could probably have found them without even leaving the campsite. “Here, look at this. It’s balminist, a grass that bugs hate. If you crush it up and add water, you can make a simple but effective insect-repelling fluid. But the duration of its effects will depend on the thickness of the fluid and won’t last more than a day at the longest, so collecting and mashing the grass just before you use it will provide the best results. And it’ll hurt your skin, so don’t rub it on yourself. Anyway, let’s take a couple handfuls to use for tonight.”

“Got it.”

We stood back to back and silently began to gather up the grass. There was nobody around to see or hear us. The wind rustled the foliage, the sound of plants rubbing together loud and clear to my ears.

“Hey,” Beck quietly said as he finally worked up the determination to talk.

“What?”

“I heard that Gazelle’s party gave you some trouble. Uh, sorry about that.”

“Huh? Why are you apologizing for that?”

“Why? Because we’re from the same slums, you know. I’ve known those guys my whole life. We weren’t even on bad terms till we became adventurers.”

“Really?”

“Oh right, maybe I’ve only ever complained about them around you. Before we registered at the guild, we talked about teaming up. But then I heard that Wist and his friends were registering too, and I was worried about them, so I decided to work with them instead. That’s when we started doing stuff separate from each other, and next thing I knew, well, you know how it is now,” Beck said. It sounded like there had been discord between them for a long time now, but Beck still cared about them on some level. “And when they make fun of the rest of my team, I sure don’t let them get away with that! I hate that!”

“I see. Well, don’t worry. I’m not mad about it. I told them that when it happened, actually.”

“Really? I didn’t know that,” Beck said. He wasn’t there, but presumably heard about the incident from people who were.

“Did you think I was going to give you a harsh punishment or something?”

“Well, I know you’ve got no mercy for your enemies. You beat up

burglars who try to steal your slimes and stuff. People always say how going after your slimes could get ugly quick.”

“Sure, I’ve beaten up burglars, and Gazelle’s team mentioned that too. Do people really talk about that all the time?”

“Why would I lie about that?”

Maybe this was something I needed to have Carme check.



By the time we finished collecting grass to be made into insect repellent, Beck’s fears had disappeared. But he had split up with his allies to speak with me, and didn’t know where they were now. Rather than go look for them, he said he wanted to help me with something as thanks for forgiving Gazelle. So we went to collect one more material in the woods.

“So we’re going pretty far into the woods?”

“I explored the edges of the woods and the areas near the river when I was gathering food and water yesterday. If it’s anywhere, I think it’d have to be further in.”

“Gilkoda leaves, you said? Do those sell for a lot?”

“Not at all. They contain medicinal components, but also poisonous ones, so not even drug stores bother with them. They can be used as an insect repellent in clothes and books, though.”

They were considered a medicinal herb, but they weren’t typically seen. I had never actually seen them myself, but when I was checking my information about this region, I found a description of them.

“Gilkoda is most easily identified by its smelly fruit. Touching those fruits can give you a rash, so be careful.”

“If it’s smelly, then maybe Ruth or Rumille could find it fast.”

“Those dog beastkin siblings? Maybe they could find it, but they’d probably hate it.”

“It smells that bad?”

“I haven’t actually seen them before, but I know the special properties of the leaves. I know of herbs with the exact same properties right down to the symptoms of their poisons, so I wanted to check these leaves for myself.”

Gilkoda trees had smelly fruit. When I looked into further details about these trees, they sounded identical to ginkgos, trees commonly planted on roadsides in Japan with leaves that turn yellow in autumn. This world had monsters and other creatures that didn’t exist on Earth, but they did use wheat and potatoes in cooking, and when it came to medicinal herbs, they had something called mogwort that was a lot like mugwort. There were many such plants and animals that resembled ones from Earth, so I thought gilkoda trees may be the same for ginkgo trees.

The wind carried a stench to our nostrils. "Is this the smell?" Beck asked.

"It came from over there. Let's go."

We walked in that direction for a few minutes, when we came upon ginkgo trees, their bright yellow leaves shining in the sunlight.

"Wow, awesome. But dang, do they smell," Beck said.

I cast Appraisal on a fallen leaf.

Gilkoda leaves: *Contains both medicinal and poisonous components.*

Medicinal Components: *Flavonoids, ginkgolides.*

Poisonous Components: *Ginkgolic acids.*

The components were listed in names that I understood. These were, without a doubt, ginkgo trees.

I opened up my Item Box to take out a towel and deodorizing fluid. "Beck, use these. Also, here's a basket for the leaves, and some gloves you can use."

They only planted male ginkgo trees by roads because they didn't bear fruit, from what I heard, but no such attention was paid to these. They were as they would be in nature. Impressed by their beautiful yellow leaves, I did what I could about the smell and took preventative measures against rashes, then started to gather up leaves.



"Thanks for the help. I wouldn't have gotten so many leaves without you."

"No problem. Now I've got a nice story to tell the rest of my party when I get back," Beck said. We finished collecting the leaves without a hitch, so now we could return to the campsite. "I'll be going, then. Need to make some insect repellent before they get back. You just have to put it in water and crush it up, right?"

"Right. Just be careful not to get any on your skin, and find a good spot to smear with it."

"Got it!"

Beck returned to his tent with an armful of balminist. Feeling that I should do the same, I went back to my base and activated my Dimension Home once I was inside. Before it was my turn for guard duty, I had to process what I had collected.

First, there were the ginkgo leaves. I had two full baskets of them, but they were still dirty. I put all the leaves in a big container and used alchemy to remove the filth. Only the leaves and the container remained inside the magic circle, while the filth was outside. I had my scavenger slimes clean up the garbage, then separated out the ginkgolic acids while I was at it. Now I had some safe ginkgo leaves.

Leaving those aside for now, next I had some mushrooms that I picked up on the way back. I wanted to use them to experiment with mushroom cultivation. I had no time for it last night due to the bloody slime incident, but I still had time today.

I opened my Item Box and took out some fallen wood that I found in the forest. I used alchemy to remove any filth and bugs from the wood and asked my scavenger slimes to get rid of it. Then I cast Polish Wheel to turn the wood into sawdust. The rapidly spinning wind and sand gradually broke the semi-dried wood down into tiny bits. I did a bit of a rough job, but this was my first experiment, so I thought it was fine. When the sawdust was done, I left it aside for the time being.

Next, I put the mushrooms in a container and used alchemy to split them apart as well, obtaining hyphae that I could cultivate in the sawdust. And as a further source of nutrients, I took fertilizer from the scavenger slimes that helped me clean up the filth. I mixed all of these together in a flat container about two meters by one meter in size and added as much water as seemed appropriate. I had no idea what would happen because I had no experience with mushroom cultivation. It would be nice if this worked as a proper mushroom bed, but I wasn't getting my hopes up.

Lastly, I'd slept in my Dimension Home last night, but I intended to sleep in my base tonight. I had to get ready for that. I took about twenty sticky slimes with me as I left the Dimension Home, then ordered them to crawl up the walls and stick to the ceiling. By having them dangle some tentacles down from up there, they could act like flypaper catching any flying bugs that got in. I could sense the enthusiasm from the lightly swinging tentacles. They seemed very dependable.

Once I also set up a mosquito net and left out an incense burner, I had created a comfortable environment for myself. I kept improving my base until it was time for guard duty.

Chapter 4 Episode 16: The Private Viewing and the Tea Break

“So this is what it looks like inside?”

“The ceiling’s covered in slimes. Are they catching bugs?”

“This little room here is a bathroom.”

“Seriously? Even a bathroom? That’s pretty complicated to set up.”

“What’s this tube?”

“That’s a water filter. You pour water through that to clean it.”

I was letting the students look at my base. Soon after my guard duty began on the second day, a boy asked if he could see it. I gave him permission to look inside, but then other students heard about that and started to gather around. There were still only six of them, but it wasn’t that big of a place, so we were pretty tightly packed together.

“Ryoma, you there?”

“Hm? Yeah, over here!” I said. I heard Gazelle’s voice outside and wondered what he needed.

“There you are. Look at this!”

When I peeked outside, he was showing me some prey with both hands. I was standing high above him, so he had to hold it straight up from below.

“Looks like you got a bird today. A pretty big one, too.”

“Yeah! Set the trap up yesterday.”

“Is that why you were late yesterday?”

“Pretty much. Anyway, the trap worked, so you can have this blood for your slimes. They eat blood, right?” he said. That was much appreciated. I was also amazed by his party’s hunting talent. “But this is all we’ve caught so far today, so let us keep the meat. I’d like to be more generous, but you know how it is.”

“The blood will be plenty. I’ll get ready to drain the blood right away. I don’t know if this is enough to repay you, but would you like to come drink tea with me inside sometime? I can make herbal tea with river water and some herbs that are lying about.”

“I’ll take what I can get. Also, can I have a look inside too?”

I knew he was a nice boy. And he was easy to understand too, which was great. “Of course. Oh, would the rest of you like tea too? I can make it with ingredients found in the area.”

"I'm good."

"Same, I need to prepare for tonight."

"Yeah, I'll be heading out now."

"Thanks for letting us see your place."

"I'll try and follow your example."

"See ya!"

I saw the six of them off, then got the tea ready.

"Shake any bugs off you before you come in," I told Gazelle. He followed my instructions, and as soon as he came inside, he stared at the walls. "Curious about something?"

"I was just thinking how these look like real nice walls. The walls at my house are old and full of holes, so they don't even keep the wind out. This place is only temporary, but it's put together way better than that."

"I see."

"I wish I could use earth magic too."

"Are you bad with earth magic?"

"I can't use magic at all. But seeing this makes me think I could fix up the walls at home if I did know magic."

"Are they that old?" I asked.

As I handed him some tea, he smiled and nodded. "Ack, that's hot... Yeah, but our house is one of the better ones. Adults come to take care of it, and they give us advice when we need it. If we could just get some repairs, it'd be fine. It looks dirty, but you can live in it. If you want to see a really awful house, you could look at the old lady's place next door, y'know?"

"I don't know, I've never seen it." I heard the other day about buildings in the slums that were basically ruins, so maybe her house was like that.

"Well, I won't have to put up with it for too much longer."

"You won't?"

"Yeah! That's why I became an adventurer. I'm still a low rank right now, but I'm gonna get better and start raking in the dough one day. Then I won't just repair the walls, I'll get a whole new house built. A huge one where everyone can live comfortably."

"That's awesome." He seemed to have a lot of ambition. "How big, exactly?"

"How big? Haven't thought about it."

That was kind of disappointing. "Well, you have time to think about it."

"I've got it!"

"That was fast!" He probably should have taken more than a second to come to a decision, at the very least, but I listened to what he came up with anyway.

“Around the size of your store would be good.”

“Why?” I couldn’t understand why my store was coming up.

“I just remembered that your store’s got two floors. That’s why.”

“That’s it?!”

“I mean, if it’s got two floors, that means it’s pretty spacious.”

“True. That does give you more living space, I guess.”



“Right? And two-story buildings are pretty rare, so they stand out.”

Maybe that was true, but it would take a lot of time and money to build one, so that wasn't going to be easy. I felt like he should have spent more time thinking about it, but he needed to actually save up the money first anyway. A vague goal was good enough for now. Rather than criticize him too much, I decided to offer my support.

“Right. So you said ‘our’ house, but is it just kids who live there?” I asked. He also mentioned that adults come to take care of it, which seemed to imply that adults weren't a regular part of the household.

“Yeah, we're not like the church or orphanage, but there are a bunch of houses in the slums full of kids without parents. They just sleep there at night, then go to work in the morning.”

“Do you have rules for living together?”

“The older kids are supposed to look after the younger ones, I guess. The adults in the neighborhood also help us out and teach us stuff. The old ex-adventurers taught us to hunt too. Oh, it's around the time of year that we need to gather firewood from outside town. We do it to make it through the winter, but going out to pick up branches when you've got free time is another rule. That kind of stuff. We don't have money, but we manage to survive together somehow. So we're all like siblings to each other, and the other three guys that are attending with me are from my house.”

“Huh.”

Children without parents got by on their own labor and assistance from those around them, which presumably gave them a stronger sense of camaraderie than average. Around when I heard this new detail about the slums, his cup seemed to be empty.

“Thanks, that was good.”

“I'm glad you enjoyed it.”

“Well, time for me to go. Still haven't hunted down the creature we need to find for our job.”

“Oh, uh, yeah.”

“Huh? Oh, I get it. Teachers can't tell us how to complete our jobs. I'm putting you in a tough spot by bringing it up, I'll bet.”

“Well, kind of.”

“Then I'll just have to find it on my own. See you later!”

Beck left my base with a hearty shout, unaware that his target didn't live anywhere around here. As for me, I decided to return to the standby area for guard duty.

Chapter 4 Episode 17: The Leader Saw It 1

~Roche's Side~

"Uh, so yeah, the matches start at 3 p.m. It'll happen in the plains over there, and Ryoma's going to make seats to watch the fights from. Just look for those when you're trying to find where to go. You're not forced to watch, though. I'm sure some of you haven't finished your jobs yet, so you can focus on that if you choose. If you have finished your jobs, though, feel free to watch. It's all up to you. That's all, dismissed!"

After the morning meeting, some students immediately went off, while some stayed around to talk for a while.

"Roche, do you have a moment?"

"What do you need, Lucas?"

"I made a chart of all the match-ups. Does this look fine to you?"

Lucas handed me a document that listed pairs of combatants and their weapons.

"Man, your handwriting is always so tiny. So with ten people, we've got five fights... Looks fine to me. We can follow this order too."

"Then I'll tell the participants when their turns are."

"Thanks. By the way, what do you think of the group this time around?"

"Their skills are still lacking, but there are a lot of enthusiastic students. And maybe it's because Ryoma's here, but having a kid their age or younger working as a teacher like the adults seems to be making a lot of them self-conscious."

"Probably. A lot of adventurers are cocky, and seeing Ryoma would have to humble them."

"Is that why you let them all know about Ryoma at the carriages on the first day?"

"That was more because it'd be tough to do his job if they thought less of him for his age. He doesn't really seem like one to assert himself much, either. Though he's definitely got the skills."

Looking at his base, I knew how skilled he had to be with earth magic, plus how much magical energy he needed to build it. You could find an adult with the same skill if you searched for them, but locating another kid Ryoma's age who could do that would be a

challenge. And if it had to be someone who would end up with plenty of magical energy left to spare after they built it, there'd be far fewer of those people. He was well above average for his age, and yet he still seemed to have room to grow.

"Hey, Lucas, you heard how Ryoma said he's still working on his magic? His real talent's with close combat; same as us, apparently."

"What? But he's using a bow in his match today."

"Yeah, I asked him to use a bow. I heard he's good with plenty of weapons. Don't know how skilled he is, but he sounded confident, so probably more skilled than with magic."

"It's terrifying to think he's still got growing to do."

"That's why I'm worried."

"About what?"

"You know what the guildmaster told me before this meetup, right? About how he's having Ryoma join and he wants me to look after him?"

"I heard that, yeah."

"Now that I think about it, maybe he was implying something there." He was strong and had plenty of camping experience; he was calm and collected. I was told all of that. "I thought the guildmaster was just saying that as a formality, but now that I'm seeing Ryoma myself, I feel like he was telling me something. Ryoma still doesn't really have allies. He's joined temporary parties for jobs a few times, but that's it."

"What, so you're supposed to put together a party for Ryoma? Sure, they're all new to adventuring, and he doesn't have that much more experience at the job than the other kids, but he's so much more skilled. He has to know that."

I fully understood what Lucas meant. Any party was going to have differences in the strength of its members, but too much of a difference could easily lead to problems down the line. That tendency was even worse with young people.

"I can't get behind pairing Ryoma up with the students here, either. The guildmaster probably feels the same way, so he must have meant something else. Maybe it's more just that we should convince Ryoma to want to join a party."

"You sure you're not overthinking things? He hasn't even been registered with the guild for a year. Doing jobs on your own can be dangerous, but he used to live in the forest by himself. I don't think we need to be leading him around in such a roundabout way. Or is there some other reason for this?"

"I don't know either." So he said, but I had a feeling that there was another reason. "But he saved my friends' lives, so I want to help him out if I can. That's not a job I've officially taken, though, so my

work here takes priority. If the guildmaster's not being clear with me, he's probably got his reasons. Unless he just forgot to say something."

"You're not wrong."

In any case, I needed to get my job done.



That afternoon, I went to ask Ryoma about seating for the fights.

"How does this look?" he asked.

"This should be plenty."

Just lining up some chairs would have been enough, but Ryoma set up three rows of chairs large enough to recline in, and they were at different elevations so that the viewers in the back wouldn't be blocked by the heads of those in the front. Not only that, but they were reinforced by leveling out and hardening the ground beneath them to create a foundation they sat on. There were also railings to prevent falling from the seats and, to make for safer viewing, there was a barrier against any stray arrows or magic. Much of this wasn't even requested, but Ryoma looked satisfied with his work, so I didn't bring it up.

"But you're fighting too, you know. You sure you should've used that much magical energy, Ryoma?" Even if he wasn't out of energy, this must have exhausted him to some extent. I thought it might have an impact on his fighting, but he still had energy to spare, much like after he built that house of his. "Crazy how you can build something like this and still be fine. You've got a ton of magical energy."

"Thank you. In a competition of magical energy, I'm confident that I wouldn't lose so easily." He was usually a pretty reserved guy, so he must have seriously had a load.

"Oh, yeah. Ryoma, I was wondering something. Why'd you want to become an adventurer?" Now that I thought about it, I didn't know much about him. I'd heard about him from my allies and the guildmaster, but I'd only met him myself recently. "Some want money, some want fame, but you're different, aren't you? If you just wanted money, you've got your laundromat. Plus, considering you've got all this magical energy and can even use barrier spells, even your young age wouldn't prevent you from working as a magician for any number of places. You don't have to risk your life being an adventurer, so I'm kind of curious, is all. You don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

"I don't mind telling you, but I don't have much of a reason. Back when I registered, I guess you could say that becoming an adventurer was the goal in itself. I was confident in the skills I picked up from living in the forest, so I thought it'd be a convenient way for me to move up in the world. And maybe it's clichéd, but I sort of yearned to

be an adventurer. My grandparents used to be adventurers, after all. Oh, and I like how much freedom this job provides.”

“I see.”

Yearning was a common reason for young people; it made sense considering his age. He was a bit more of a realist in some of what he said, but that could hardly be considered a flaw.

“Roche, may I ask a question of you?”

“Can’t promise I’ll know the answer, but go ahead.”

“When you said there were a lot of places where I could be a magician, you made it sound like barrier magic was particularly important. Does it have a big influence on job opportunities?”

“What? You know barrier magic, and yet you didn’t know that?”

“I know that it’s difficult magic to learn, more so than most. But I’m ashamed to admit that I lived outside society for so long, I’m ignorant about a few things.”

“Well, simply put, it demands more skill than the elemental magic we typically use. When magical energy leaves the body, it disappears. You know that, right?” He nodded. I figured he’d know the basics. “But the caster can control the energy and keep it from disappearing. These are the fundamentals when it comes to magic, but you don’t have to think about it too much when you use elemental magic; you can just expel the magical energy and use it before it disappears. It won’t be as powerful otherwise, so you’d need to do better than that to be a proper mage, but that’s another story.”

Barrier magic involved creating walls against assorted objects by using magical energy, usually for defensive purposes. While offensive magic only needed to function for an instant, barriers were best projected for as long as possible.

“So you have to keep your magical energy from disappearing and hold it in place. You need great control of your magical energy as a minimum requirement for using barrier magic. You’d need to at least be able to use mid-level elemental spells to meet that minimum requirement. But strictly speaking, skill with elemental magic and skill with magical energy control are two separate things. Just being able to use mid-level spells doesn’t necessarily mean you can use barrier magic. How’d you learn it?”

“My grandmother taught me.”

“If she could use barrier magic, she was a pretty rare sort of adventurer.”

“Seems like it would be useful for camping and whatnot, though.”

“It would be, but the threshold for learning it is high. You had someone who could teach you, but if you hadn’t, you’d have had to go looking for a mentor. Then you’d have needed to train under them until you got competent with barrier magic, which takes time. And

barrier magicians are always in demand from the rich, so you'd usually be hired along with your mentor. Even if that wasn't the case, there'd be plenty of people hiring elsewhere. So most people who learn barrier magic don't bother to become adventurers; they have easier ways to make a living. You can already use barrier magic, and even if you're inexperienced with it, you've got plenty of potential, considering your age. So if you really look for a mentor, I think you'd find one with relatively little work. And either way, your ability to use barrier magic shows that your control over magical energy is above average. You should be able to land a pretty good magic-related job if you look for one. That's about all I know about that, though. If you want to learn more, go ask Lucy or Mimir. I just did some research on this so I could answer questions for students, but magic is what those two specialize in."

"Thank you, that was very helpful!"

He got really bright-eyed for some reason. Some of what I said was pretty common knowledge, but it didn't seem like he was just pretending not to already know these things to be nice. Speaking of which, he looked at me the same way when I answered his questions before. I thought he was calm and knowledgeable for his age, but he was oddly lacking in some areas in a worrisome way. Maybe this was what the guildmaster wanted to tell me?

Chapter 4 Episode 18: The Leader Saw It 2

“It’s over! The winner is Lucas!” I announced as the audience cheered. The battles between the teachers were underway, and Lucas had won the third match. It didn’t really matter who won or lost, but it made me happy seeing one of my party members prevail. I had to take an unbiased approach as a judge, though. “Now it’s learning time. Talk about your weapons. Lucas, you start.”

“Got it. I talked about it before the match, but I use this hammer. People say hammers are heavy and tough to handle, but like you just saw, you can fix that with enough strength and training. And when you get a clean hit in, it does massive damage.”

“I blocked it with my shield, and it still knocked me away,” the swordsman he’d fought added with a smile. He fought with a wooden sword in his right hand and a shield in his left, but as soon as he took a direct hit from Lucas’s hammer, he was in an unfavorable position.

Many kinds of shields existed, but the one-handed shield he used wasn’t meant to take attacks from heavy weapons. It would be fine for regular swords or spears, but hammers had to be dodged or the impact could be fatal. The swordsman failed, taking a hit that dented his shield and made it hard to move his left arm.

When they finished reflecting on the battle and teaching about the unique properties of their weapons, I called out to the swordsman as they were switching places with the next participants. “Carmine, is your hand alright? Are you injured?”

“It’s very numb, but there’s no pain. I think I’m fine.”

“I hope you’re right, but don’t push yourself too hard. You should go ask Ryoma for healing magic from his slimes.” Ryoma told me before the first match that he brought a healing slime. He was saving his own magical energy for his match and leaving the healing to the slime instead. It was currently sitting on top of his head. “He says he’s providing healing for free throughout this camping excursion.”

“That’s good to know. Maybe I’ll go ask him for a checkup, then. Sure would suck if it turned out I’ve got some weird disease I didn’t know about, though.”

“I mean, if you do have a disease, you want to know about that sooner than later.” Also, healing magic could only cure injuries. And I had to wonder what he was thinking of when he mentioned weird

diseases.

“Roche! We’re ready!”

“Oh, I’ll be right there!” It sounded like they were prepared for the next match. “See you later. Make sure you get your arm checked.”

I left Carmine and got back to my job as the judge. “Next up, we have Lucy wielding magic versus Bosco dual-wielding swords! Match 4, begin!”

The crowd cheered again, but then a throaty shout silenced the students. It came from Bosco, who sank into the ground, dropped his swords, and started writhing around. It wasn’t him trying to do that, but from one look at Lucy, it was clear she had done something. She looked at me calmly.

“Uh, looks like it’s all over. Lucy wins!” I announced, but nobody cheered this time. Instead, the students seemed confused.

First Bosco needed some help, but it looked like a few people went to drag him off the stage, so I didn’t need to jump in. He wasn’t injured, and while he was dirty, Ryoma could clean him up later. That kid was doing a lot of work behind the scenes. He worked fast too, and it was nice having someone like him around.

“Lucy, explain.”

“Right, right. Attention! So, do you understand that I’m the one who did that?” she asked. I declared her the winner, so all the students nodded. “And I’m a magician, so naturally I used magic to do this. Does anyone know what magic I used?”

“Earth magic!”

“It has to be water magic!”

“But she buried an adult up to his neck. Wouldn’t that be earth magic?”

“Take a close look at the ground. She turned it to mud using water magic.”

Most of them answered with either earth or water magic. They weren’t wrong, but they weren’t exactly right.

“Was it a composite spell using both earth and water magic?” Ryoma asked. He was sitting with the students like he was one of them.

“That’s correct, Ryoma! It’s a bit of an advanced technique, but you can mix multiple elements together. That’s called composite magic. It’s hard to use, but it stretches the limits of what magic can do. One example is the earth and water composite magic that I used, which is also referred to as mud magic. Mud isn’t an element and this is just a nickname, but as you witnessed, you can use it to turn the ground to mud and create nearly bottomless swamps.”

“She set up that spell before the match, then made a swamp for Bosco to sink into the moment the match began,” I explained. Bosco’s

best attribute was his speed, which he made good use of. He was a reliable fighter and by no means weak, but this swamp completely took his speed advantage away.

“Using magic demands a lot of focus, so it’s easy to find yourself defenseless just before you cast a spell. So if any of you want to be magicians, remember to always stay far from your opponents. Coming up with ways to keep your enemies away is standard for any magician. Learning some close combat skills isn’t a bad idea either.”

Her advice was correct, but I thought she could’ve changed her teaching approach a little. She was the second youngest of the teachers after Ryoma, and the way she went about this demonstration was immature. Not to mention it was probably depressing for Bosco, but also a good lesson for him. I decided to go cheer him up later.

The next and final match was about to start. Ryoma and Howard stepped up.

“Are you ready?”

“Yeah. And you, Ryoma?”

“All good.”

Howard whittled down a branch and wrapped the tip with a cloth to make a mock spear. Ryoma held a bow in one hand and carried a large quiver over his shoulder.

“What’s in there?” I asked.

“Some extra jinto arrows.”

I asked him what those were, and he showed me his arrows. They looked like they had fishing weights in place of arrowheads.

“You call these jinto arrows where you’re from?”

“Yes, but maybe they’re not common around here. They’re usually made of wood, but I was in a rush, so I used earth magic.”

“As long as they’re not sharp,” Howard said. “Here’s to a good fight, Ryoma.”

“Likewise, Howard.”

The match had yet to start, but still, they were pretty cordial with each other. Howard was always pretty relaxed, but I thought Ryoma would be tenser.

“As entertainment for New Year’s parties up until a few years ago, I used to show off my skills in front of an audience. It was the only talent I really had to show off at those events. I also met some sword dancers at this year’s Founding Festival and got up on stage with them, so I have some experience with performing for an audience.”

“I see.”

“Oh, but I don’t have much experience with combat competitions. When I showed people how I fought, I always demonstrated on inanimate objects.”

“Just do what you’d normally do in a fight. Fire off some arrows

and don't worry about it too much!"

"Right!" Ryoma answered with vigor and ran off to his starting position. To emphasize the advantages of using a bow, he was spaced twenty meters from Howard.

"Now, let's get this thing started," Howard said.

"Sounds good. By the way, Howard..."

"Hm? Something up?"

"You better take this seriously. Ryoma's supposed to be pretty good in a fight."

"Oh, that? I know."

Howard's expression tensed just a bit. He had a tendency to fool around, but he knew how to get things done when needed. He was probably taking things more seriously on the inside than on the outside.

"You ready?!" I asked of them one last time as they faced each other from their starting positions.

"Ready when you are!"

"I'm good!"

"Then let's start! Match 5, begin—?!"

Suddenly but instantly, I felt the air become crushingly heavy, not so much with my brain as with my body and skin.

Chapter 4 Episode 19: The Leader Saw It 3

“Graaaaaaaah!”

Howard trampled the grass and jumped from his starting position. His battle cry invigorated himself and intimidated his enemies. It hardly showed from his appearance, but he had beastkin in his ancestry and had a bad habit of roaring before battles. When he was young, he would even roar during what were supposed to be surprise attacks. Through a lot of hard work, he managed to improve this issue, and now he seldom roared at all. That he roared now showed that he was serious. At the same time, it immediately made clear that he seldom took other fights as seriously. It looked like he was even using energy meditation to enhance himself and his weapon. This was undoubtedly terrifying.

Howard’s ferocity caused a stir in the audience, but Ryoma was the one taking the pressure from him up front, and he looked unfazed. In contrast to Howard, he was as quiet and stoic as the still surface of a lake. But his gaze was piercingly sharp, like he saw his opponent only as a target. Ryoma made no attempt to intimidate. He cared only about hunting his prey. Compared to his usual calm demeanor, he was like a different person. It felt like he pointed his weapon at his target without mercy, and just standing within his range gave me goosebumps.

They were like a wild beast and a calculating hunter. It was strangely tense for a mock battle. I might have stopped it, but didn’t have the time to think about it before an arrow was fired at Howard.

“You ain’t hitting me!” Howard shouted.

The arrow whizzed straight at Howard, but we were in the plains and Ryoma had nothing to hide behind, so the timing of his attacks was clear to see. And this was a planned battle in the first place, so he knew from the start that he would be targeted. If he were faced with a barrage of arrows, that would probably be different, but this was a single arrow from a single person. Howard just turned a bit and avoided it with ease.

But a moment later, Howard had to swipe forward with his spear to knock another arrow away. “He predicted how Howard would dodge the first arrow and fired a second one, eh? Fired them at pretty quick intervals, too,” I whispered as Ryoma kept firing arrows.



He aimed not only for big targets like Howard's torso, but periodically went after harder targets like his legs, spear, or even his hands. But he didn't go after vital areas like the head or heart because this wasn't supposed to be a fight to the death. He was trying to reduce Howard's mobility before he got close enough to attack or to destroy his weapon entirely. It was like two or three archers were showering Howard with arrows and, while none of them hit him, they did considerably slow his advance.

I was surprised by the speed and precision with which he attacked, but that also meant he must have been quickly burning through his arrows. Much like magic, you could only attack with a bow a limited number of times. And Howard wasn't going to go down easily. He was facing a tough battle for now, but he ran all about the plains and endured Ryoma's onslaught as he awaited his chance to strike back.

But Ryoma was more than competent with a bow, at least a Level 4, if not Level 5. Howard had to make use of his experience and sheer willpower to compete, but if he let his guard down for a second, he would be done for. Were this a surprise attack in a forest, the whole party could be wiped out. But here, he had no way to land a winning blow. To make that perfectly clear, the equilibrium between them was soon broken when Ryoma slowed down his rate of attack out of concern for his remaining arrow supply.

"Gotcha!" Howard howled and tried to jump right up to Ryoma. To counter, Ryoma cast Earth Fence and created a row of tons of evenly spaced bars to block his path. He probably planned to use those to avoid close combat and attack through the gaps between the bars. Howard was strong enough to smash through them and tried, but then Ryoma cast Break Rock and Storm to produce a cloud of dirt.

"Whoa!"

"Hey!"

"It reaches all the way over here!"

It sounded like the cloud fell over the audience too. I could sense how much magical energy he used, so it made sense, but the spells he cast were basic ones. Ryoma noticed that Howard was about to bust through the bars, so he just crumbled the bars into dirt himself and summoned a storm. It did no damage, but made it difficult to see.

"Ah! Seriously?!" Howard cried.

A small silhouette ran through the dirt cloud and closed in on Howard himself. He was too close to use his bow, so he grabbed an arrow and thrust at Howard's eyes and throat. Real arrowheads are small, but they're still sharp, pointed blades. They could easily harm a human eye. And depending on the distance, arrows could even

penetrate armor, so I guess they could be used for stabbing too. I had never seen an arrow used in close combat before, but it didn't look like Ryoma had just gotten desperate. He swiftly and adeptly switched the arrow from an overhand to an underhand grip and stabbed from various angles. It worked well enough in the event that the enemy got close, from the look of it.

Howard backed away to gain some distance, as did Ryoma at the same time. And right after that, Howard yelped as his cheek was grazed by an arrow. Ryoma fired the arrow he had been using in close combat the moment there was space between him and Howard. And as the wind carried the cloud of dirt away and cleared their vision, Ryoma's rapid fire began again. On his shoulder was a satchel full of arrows, and at his feet was a different, empty satchel.

Ryoma hid a second satchel in his Item Box to make up for the weakness of using a bow. He didn't just show all the arrows he had at the start. I didn't know how many more arrows he had in store, but this wasn't against the rules or anything. Ryoma now repelled Howard, leaving them evenly matched once again.

"Teleport!" Ryoma shouted.

"Where'd he go?! Uh-oh!"

"Teleport!"

There was no way to guess where he would teleport. He instantly moved from blind spot to blind spot and attacked. Losing sight of him for even an instant slowed Howard's reactions. This took a lot of magical energy to do, but everyone knew that Ryoma had a lot to spare.

It was clear now that Ryoma had taken full control of the battle, and I could see why the guildmaster worried about him. Ryoma was strong. I didn't know what school of fighting he trained under, but he learned from them well. He didn't wield magic as well as a weapon, but he was still quite good. He could cast spells in quick succession and had a ludicrous quantity of energy.

Even when it came to skills for everyday life, he was talented. There was the house he built with earth magic, but he also had plentiful knowledge of medicine. He could procure food effortlessly. He had his own business back in town. He couldn't have asked for a more stable life. In all ways, he was far beyond the norm. A boy of his age with such skill was nothing short of stunning. If he took the job seriously, he could become a B Rank adventurer or greater within five years. I would bet on it. As of this moment, Ryoma had little to be concerned with in life.

Put another way, though, this meant that he needed no help from anyone. When you can do everything on your own, you don't need to ask for assistance. And the help of others could even be perceived as a

burden if they didn't reach his level. Ryoma excelled at everything, and because of that, he was isolated.

That was how it seemed to me, and as I watched this match of his as a judge, I realized that he needed to seriously change his perspective. Adventuring inevitably meant danger. The danger increased with each rank, and the number of safe jobs decreased. Most adventurers would trip up at a low rank and learn the limits of their own power and the need for allies, but that probably wouldn't happen to Ryoma.

If he slacked off and failed at some point, that would be for the better. A saying among adventurers was that the more talented the newbie, the sooner they'd die. They'd take their work seriously, getting better and better at jobs in the lower ranks until they never failed anymore. It happened all the faster if they were talented. But then that adventurer would climb the ranks too fast, and they'd only learned their limits when it was too late.

Every adventurer with a decent amount of experience knew someone like this. You'd hear people talk about them at the guild, about how they never thought this person could die, how they were so strong, and how they could've become something great if they weren't so reckless. The people that get looked down on for their lack of talent, on the other hand, would sometimes stay in the profession longer than anyone.

That was probably why the guildmaster worried about him. I knew as well as him that Ryoma Takebayashi had talent, and that he could easily die young. He was several steps above the level of skill I first expected too, so he could put himself in a very dangerous spot. If he had no allies who could stop him, then maybe it had to be us. The guildmaster probably wanted to do something while there was still time.

Howard was hit by a flurry of arrows about a minute later.

Chapter 4 Episode 20: After the Match

~Ryoma's Side~

When the match ended, the students and teachers in the audience were quite divided.

“Ryoma! That was incredible!”

“How’d you get so good?”

“Not bad! But we won’t lose to you!”

“If I started training with a bow now, how long would it take until I could use it in real combat?”

One side included Gazelle and Beck’s party, and they respected my talent. Even after I explained how I fought, they kept coming up to me to ask questions.

The other side kept their distance, as though they were avoiding me. After Roche thanked all the participants and declared the event over, they quickly ran off. I could only assume that was because of what they saw in my fight.

“Did I do something wrong?” I wondered. “Maybe I scared them or something.”

After I answered the students’ questions, I decided to talk to Roche about it.

“Scaring them was part of it, I think,” he said. Maybe it was because I looked weak at first glance. Even Beck’s party underestimated me at first. “It’s gotten pretty clear now that you’re strong. And maybe you were just taking the fight seriously, but you suddenly came off like a totally different person. Even I thought it looked like you lacked some humanity. It was like I was being hunted by a predator.”

I thought that now that I looked like this, I’d be able to scare people less, but alas. I never thought about how I came across in battle.

“Don’t worry about it too much,” Roche consoled me. “Nobody was expecting it, so I’m sure they’re just a bit freaked out right now. Give them time, and I’m sure some of them will chill out.

“On another subject, remember how I asked you before about why you became an adventurer? This kind of connects to that, but do you have any particular goals as an adventurer?”

I thought he wanted to get off that topic, but he sounded sincere, so I straightened myself out and answered him. “My goal right now is to go to the Sea of Trees of Syrus.”

“There, of all places?”

Once he was done asking me questions, Roche seemed to understand. But at the same time, he was holding his head in his arms like he had some problem with my objective. When I asked him about it, he said that he was under the impression that the guildmaster wanted him to get me to join a party, and that having us both on this job was to introduce us to each other for that purpose.

“A party? Wait, should you be telling me this?”

“I’m only guessing that this is what the guildmaster wants anyway. He didn’t tell me not to say anything, and I’m just telling you what I think. As you start taking higher ranking jobs, they’ll just keep getting more dangerous. The Sea of Trees of Syrus is one of those dangerous places you could go. You’re supposed to be at least C Rank to take jobs there, but that assumes you have a party. Actually going there alone as a C Rank adventurer is suicide. You get me?”

Roche picked up a stick and drew a circle with another circle inside on the ground. “Maybe you’d know all this given where you’re from, or maybe the way you think about things is just different, but try to see how people from the outside look at it. First of all, the further into the Sea of Trees of Syrus you go, the stronger the monsters you encounter. Thinking of these circles as the Sea of Trees, you could only effectively operate solo as a C Rank adventurer in this outer circle. Once you enter the inner circle, you start to see A and B Rank monsters everywhere, and you’d have no hope of making it to the center.

“I don’t know where your hometown was, but from what you told me, I can’t imagine it was in the outer area. It would’ve had to be deep in the forest. You’ll be forced to fight numerous battles. And the actual Sea of Trees has that name for a reason: it’s vast. Even if there weren’t any monsters, it’d take more than a couple days to reach your destination. Doesn’t matter that you have space magic, it’ll still be rough out there on your own.

“If I’m being honest, neither I nor the guildmaster have any right to stop you. Like I keep saying in our morning gatherings, adventurers have to take responsibility for themselves. If you reach the required rank, you can go anywhere you want.”

The guildmaster had shown me this job so Roche could tell me all this, presumably. But I wasn’t convinced. “I’m sorry, but I can’t see myself joining a party,” I said.

I had temporarily teamed up with Jeff or Miya on a few occasions. Before the Founding Festival, I even worked with Beck’s party. I had

no problem with those jobs. But if I had to be around people all the time, for every job, it just didn't sound like a good fit for me. I tried to imagine it, but it gave me some indescribable discomfort that I couldn't shake off.

"You don't have to do it right away," Roche said. "Honestly, I think you'll be fine on your own in the outer area of the Sea of Trees. That was a pretty impressive fight, and I could really feel your strength. But just remember that people with that kind of strength have a tendency to put themselves in danger. I've only survived as long as I have thanks to my allies. They were around to stop me when I didn't know when to quit. It's happened plenty of times. Finding allies that can match your skills probably won't be easy, but at least think about it before you go to the Sea of Trees."

"Thank you," I said. I didn't know how to respond, but I at least appreciated that he cared.

"No problem, I've just been in the business for a while and I thought I could offer some advice. Besides, I hate to see someone die young because they weren't more cautious. Especially if it was someone who saved my life before. If I were a bit younger, maybe I would've gone with you, but I think I'd just be a burden nowadays."

"Really?"

Roche stretched his shoulders and sighed. "I got close to A Rank back in the day, but now a goblin knight can take me off guard and nearly kill me. You healed that wound for me, so you should know."

I did remember that, but apparently this meant that Roche used to be B Rank. "When you introduced yourself, I seem to remember you said that you were C Rank," I said.

"My whole party stepped down from B to C. Not many folks do that, but if you've got a good reason, you can drop your rank at any time if you do the paperwork. My problem is that I was too reckless when I was younger and got injured a whole bunch of times, so I can't move like I used to. These last few years in particular, my old age has really killed my stamina. I can handle myself in short spurts, but if I had to fight as much as you would in the Sea of Trees, I'd get worn down pretty quickly.

"I wasn't even sure about getting to A Rank at some point, and my allies realized it'd be dangerous to keep taking jobs that I wasn't feeling so confident about. In the end, we gave up on getting to A Rank. Then we dropped down to C Rank because it seemed like a good idea to commit and give up any hope of getting there. Wait, what am I talking about?" Roche said and bashfully scratched his cheek. "Anyway, that's what happened. We decided to use the time we have left to train the next generation and save up money for retirement."

I guess that was a choice some adventurers had to make, but it sounded kind of sad. “By the way, Roche, do you know a lot about the Sea of Trees of Syrus?”

“I wouldn’t say a lot. I’ve been there a few times, though.”

“Then you have some experience, at least. Could you tell me more about it?”

“Sure, but aren’t you from there?”

“Well, I hardly interacted with the other villagers there. It was usually my grandparents who spoke to them when they were alive, and I left the village soon after they passed away.”

“I see. That’s understandable. If I were a parent, I wouldn’t want my kid getting accustomed to a place like that. Oh, sorry, not trying to insult your home.”

“I don’t have any attachment to anything there aside from my grandparents, so I don’t mind. I just wonder what you mean by that. What does it seem like to someone from the outside?”

“Well, to put it simply, people from the Sea of Trees think that strength is everything. It’s dangerous territory, so strength is in high demand, and powerful adventurers are praised. You see some of that everywhere, but the Sea of Trees goes too far with it. For example,” Roche said and pointed to the campground, “everyone’s camping there, but if this territory had dangerous monsters instead of poison bugs, how do you think that’d be?”

“We would probably have to put all of our energy into protecting the students.”

“Right. Now what would happen if we abandoned the students in that situation?”

“I don’t especially want to think about that, but I imagine it would be tragic.”

“At the relay points meant for adventurers, there are a fair number of merchants and artisans that buy materials off adventurers, sell supplies, and repair equipment. Without them, it’d be harder for adventurers to do their job. They support us. And with their support, adventurers strive to defend these locations. So really, we should all be seen as equals,” Roche muttered, then paused before he continued. “But over time, the power dynamics between the protectors and the protected there have become distorted. The strong have the glory, while the weak can’t survive without protection. We haven’t been there in about a decade, but it was like that all over the place. Some people who live there for a while start to get that attitude as well.”

“And then what?”

“People will turn a blind eye to their cruelty in the Sea of Trees, but it’s generally frowned upon in the outside world. They start to have problems once they leave. I hear some of those people get fed up

and just return to the Sea of Trees. Also, since they'll accept some bad behavior as long as you're strong, the place tends to attract some nasty adventurers."

Whether they were poorly behaved, virtually criminals, or unable to get jobs at other guilds for whatever reason, they would be welcomed in the Sea of Trees as long as they had the skills for the job. Their views were so different from those immediately outside the forest that it was like a completely different culture.

"I'd go there for work, but I wouldn't want to raise any kids there. When I heard you were from there, I was kind of shocked. You must've had a pretty wonderful family."

"Thank you."

I was a little disappointed after the match, but I ended up getting some good advice. I didn't know if I could live up to Roche and the guildmaster's hopes, but I decided to at least look into forming a party when I got back home.

Chapter 4 Episode 21: The Journey Home

A day passed. A lot happened during the trip, but everyone made it to the final day safely. Now we only had to return to Gimul. We prepared to set off in the morning, had a quick lunch before noon, then boarded the carriages for a rocky ride back.

“Day five already, huh?”

“That went by pretty quick.”

“I thought it’d feel longer.”

We were divided between the carriages in the same groups as when we came. That went for my group too, but they seemed to be more open with each other after the lessons. They needed Roche’s help to get talking on the first day, but now they naturally began a conversation about what they did yesterday.

“Don’t get too excited!”

“Yeah, we’re just heading home now, but the training’s not over yet.”

The teachers warned the students. I knew how they felt, but any time you were outside town, there was always the possibility of encountering monsters or bandits.

Once they were warned, the students began to carefully watch their surroundings. They were probably trying to do a good job, but it was easy to tell that they were new to this. They were so tense that they would tire themselves out. Roche and Lucy didn’t say anything, but they were awkwardly grinning too.

But a peaceful air blew through the carriage. We didn’t run into any monsters or bandits, so we made it to today’s campground safely. But we did find something unexpected there.

“Roche.”

“Yeah, looks like we’ll be sharing the place tonight.”

As we were unloading the carriages, we heard the sound of wheels from afar. A carriage with a large canopy was heading toward us. It slowed down as it drew closer, then stopped a short distance from us.

“Mind if we take this space here?” the coachman of the carriage asked Roche.

“Not a problem.”

The coachman left the carriage at the edge of the camp.

“Attention!” Roche shouted. “You all remember the rules for using

campgrounds? We're not the only ones here today. You can bug us, but don't bug the other guests. If anyone's forgotten the rules, come on over!"

Again the students were warned not to bother anyone else. Then the teachers nonchalantly kept an eye on the new carriage. Sometimes bandits would pretend to be using the campground only to attack travelers. Some simply used their greater numbers and strength to their advantage, some struck while the other visitors were asleep, some acted friendly and offered drugged food or drinks, but they used all kinds of approaches. As such, the safest way to use campgrounds was to interact with other groups as little as possible. That was a general rule, but it had its exceptions.

"Do you have a moment?" a skinny, well-dressed man asked after he left the carriage. Attending him was a man who seemed to be a bodyguard.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Did you come from that direction? If so, I'd like to ask what's over there. What's the terrain like and what monsters are there and such? How would we best keep safe?"

"The leader would know the most about that. I'll show you where he is."

"That helps, thanks."

For travelers, knowing the state of the road was crucial to survival. Treading a dangerous path could cost you your life. Gathering information in town beforehand was the standard approach, but it was always possible that the situation could change on the road. Exchanging information with other travelers was more than worthwhile.

"Leader, these people want to know about the road ahead."

"Got it."

I left this to Roche, but he let me listen in for future reference. He didn't seem to do anything that special, though. He just got straight to the point and told them what the road was like, nothing more. The conversation was over in less than ten minutes, then the two travelers went straight back to their carriage.

"Ryoma, what do you think about those two?" Roche whispered to me as they left.

"They didn't seem all that suspicious, but it seemed like they knew how to fight. Not just the bodyguard, but the man who said he was a merchant too." The bodyguard must have known how to fight, of course, but the self-proclaimed merchant's hands had calluses that likely came from wielding a weapon. Despite that, the way he carried himself wasn't all that refined. "I feel like he's probably about as powerful as that bodyguard."

In my experience, there were a lot of bandits that came across the same way. But this was a world where monsters and bandits could be encountered regularly, so rather than simply depending on a bodyguard, trying to learn to fight with a weapon on your own as a regular person wasn't unusual. Of the merchants I knew, Pioro of the Saionji Trading Company had calluses from an oft-used weapon as well. I never went out of my way to ask him about that, but I suspected that he knew the basics of fighting with a dagger. Serge of the Morgan Trading Company didn't seem like he could use a weapon, but I had seen him walking around with a magic item for self-defense. So the man's calluses alone didn't tell me that he was suspicious.

"Was there something sketchy about him?" I asked.

"No, I had the same thought you did. Nothing much suspicious about him. But considering the time of year it is, you know."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, it's almost winter. From winter to spring, and especially around New Year's, there's a lot of socializing among the nobles. And in preparation, they procure food and drinks for parties, dresses and accessories, all kinds of things. And for some crops, harvest time is just before winter. It's a profitable time for merchants, as well as the bandits who target them."

"I see."

Now that I thought about it, there were only a few months left until the end of the year. When I lived in the forest, I just knew it was cold from autumn to winter and it got warm again in spring, so I didn't think much about New Year's.

"Well, it can't hurt to keep an eye on them. You were going to stand watch tonight, weren't you, Ryoma?"

"Right."

"Then you can handle that. And if they do happen to attack us, do you have any experience fighting bandits? Any reservations about killing another human being?"

"I'll be fine. I killed a bandit named Melzen of the Red Lance for a bounty once."

"Your skills do seem suited for that," Roche said. He knew, but was asking just to be sure.

"Suited for what?"

"Fighting other humans. I don't know if your school of fighting was focused on combat with people, or if your grandpa learned these skills because he was wary of the other villagers. Either way, the way you fought Howard reminded me of a mercenary or a soldier."

"You could tell?"

"When you've been in this job as long as I have, you learn a few things. Adventurers have to fight all kinds of foes, but humans and

monsters behave in different ways. You often see adventurers who specialize in fighting one or the other, so you learn how to tell them apart on sight. I figured you'd handle this job well anyway, but if you've done some bounty hunting before, you'll be fine. We're all depending on you if worst comes to worst."

"I'll do my best."

"Now, as far as how you should fight if they actually attack..."

Fighting one person was different from fighting several, so at the end of our chat, Roche taught me a secret strategy.

Later that night, I prepared to fight back at any time and took my turn standing guard. Nothing happened during my turn, so I switched places with the next guard and went to sleep.



Morning arrived.

"Good morning, Howard."

"Hey, morning."

We considered the possibility that they would strike when we were deep asleep in the early morning, but they never did.

"So nothing happened in the end."

"That's usually how it goes. Always a pain when it's hard to tell if they're bandits or not. I wish they'd all just dress like obvious bandits, that'd make things simple."

"I feel like if it looked that obvious, it would actually be kind of confusing."

"You've got a point there," Howard said with a chuckle. "Bandits are never that upfront. But sometimes they'll attack you from behind, so stay on your toes. We'll be leaving as soon as everyone's ready, but watch to see how the students are doing if you have the time."

"Understood."

All I had left to do was place my luggage in my Item Box, so I finished that quickly and walked around to check on the students. Suddenly, Wist walked over from the watering hole.

"Good morning."

"G-Good morning, Ryoma. On patrol?"

"Yeah, I'm already ready to leave anyway."

"Wow, you're fast."

"Were you drawing water and doing laundry?" He was carrying a few canteens and a portable pot, so I had a hunch.

"Yeah. I was cleaning this up as well," he said, turning around to show me the big shield on his back.

Wist was already big for his age, but the shield was still big enough that it made him look like a rhinoceros beetle. Even his limbs looked like they had insect-like exoskeletons because of the glossy

protectors he wore. As I recalled, Beck wore armor made of a similar material. But he wasn't as heavily armored as Wist, so it didn't leave much of an impression.

"Your equipment has changed a lot since the last time I saw you."

"Yeah. Jeff taught me all about how to use a shield while I was saving up money. The armor's made from the tunnel ants you helped us with." Looking at him in his full set of armor, he would seem pretty strong if you didn't hear him talk.

"You decided to take a defensive role?"

"Yeah. I've got a short, one-handed spear under here, but I still have trouble bringing myself to attack in a fight. But I've at least got strength, so I can protect everyone else like this, maybe. A little bit." He ought to have spoken with more confidence. But he at least seemed to be looking for a way to make himself useful.

"Let's all do the best we can. Oh, would you be interested in taking a job with me again?"

"What?! Ryoma, I can't keep up with you yet."

"Well, I take some odd jobs that you could do just fine." Jeff was working with them as a teacher too, so as long as they didn't mind me, I figured I could do jobs with them. I was closer to their rank than Jeff too, and it would help me practice working with others. "Just keep it in mind if you ever feel like it."

"O-Okay, thanks! I'll tell everyone!"

I was a bit worried about what he meant by everyone as I watched Wist walk toward the tents.

"Oh, good morning!" I said to two male teachers who happened to pass by just then, but they ignored me. I was really starting to question my communication skills.

Chapter 4 Episode 22: The Guildmaster's Decision

Thirty minutes after we departed, our carriages traveled down the mountain road surrounded by trees. The shade from the trees meant it was dim despite being daytime, and while I was a little cold, the wind was refreshing.

"Hey, Ryoma," Roche said as I was enjoying the air. "Any interest in getting familiars other than slimes?" He looked at the healing slime sitting on my head. It was helping watch for threats.

"I have limour birds too, actually."

"Really? I always thought you just collected slimes."

"It's mostly slimes, admittedly."

"No interest in trying other types of familiars?"

"Well, it's not like I refuse to accept anything but slimes, but there are so many types of slimes that are so fascinating. Focusing on slimes hasn't caused me any problems either, so I haven't thought much about obtaining other kinds of familiars."

"I see. If you don't want to work with people, I thought maybe utilizing more familiars would work too." It sounded like he was suggesting that in place of a party.

"Roche, I know you're worried about Ryoma, but you don't need to rush him," Lucy said.

"Guess so. I was just wondering."

"Yeesh, I don't think the guildmaster needed you to get this obsessed. Sorry, Ryoma, I'm sure he's annoying you."

"No, I know he's just looking out for me."

"You're a good kid," Lucy said with a smile. "There are a lot of nosy people out there, but you don't have to listen to them. I don't think you should do anything too dangerous or reckless either, but when it comes down to it, you shouldn't have to give up on doing what you want to do."

"Thank you."

"It's nothing. Oh, but I'll at least say that sticking with just slimes would be a bit unfortunate. It's fine if that's what you want to do, but you've been blessed with the ability to use taming magic, so it might be worth your while to check out other monsters too. If you had a horse-type monster like a red horse or a battle horse, you could ride them around, for example. I think taming an animal you could travel

on would be useful.”

“You have a point.”

Right now, my traveling was done either on foot or through space magic. I never had trouble traveling anyway, but a familiar I could ride on would help to conserve my magical energy and stamina. There was no way that slimes or limour birds could carry me, and even if they could, it would probably be slower than just moving myself. So if I wanted to put this idea into action, I would have to capture a new monster.

“If you’re not sure what to go for, why not ask the tamer’s guild?” Roche said. “I’m pretty sure they have a reception desk where you can ask questions like that. Actually, have they not given you any suggestions already?”

“Actually, well, I’m technically registered there, but I couldn’t take any jobs at first because all I had was slimes. Now I haven’t been to the tamer’s guild since I turned in some members of it to the city guards after they harassed my store. Not for any particular reason, but I find it kind of hard to visit when I have no need to.”

“Then maybe this is a good time for you to give them a visit,” Lucy said. “Sounds like you haven’t taken the familiar aptitude exam, either.”

“I haven’t. I’ve never even heard of it.”

“The tamer’s guild has you try to form contracts with a whole bunch of different monsters, then combine that data with your past results to narrow down your specialties, from what I hear.”

“Isn’t your first time free?” Roche asked.

“It is, if I’m remembering right. So it couldn’t hurt to give it a shot.”

She was right about that. I didn’t feel inconvenienced in any way at the moment, but it sounded like it could be worthwhile. I decided to pay them a visit before I forgot.

“What monsters would be helpful to have as an adventurer?” I asked.

“I’d just have to go with something you can ride,” Roche said. “I’ve always wanted a wyvern or something you could fly on.”

“I might like some type of fairy,” Lucy said. “They can use magic, and forming a contract with one is supposed to improve the effects of your own magic too. Even finding one and making it your familiar is apparently pretty hard, though.”

They both had ample experience, so talking to them was fascinating. But we eventually ran out of topics to discuss, and the time for silence arrived. The air in the carriage felt heavy.

When I looked at the students, they froze up. Ever since my match the other day it felt like some of the students were avoiding me, but

the ones here looked up to me. However, they seemed to see me as so amazing that they felt some distance between us. They could speak with Roche and Lucy just fine, but the conversation ended when I tried to join in. In the end, I found myself in this situation. They looked at me with a sort of envy, but even that made things hard for me. Then again, it was better than riding with a boss everyone hates for a company trip, I guess.



It was quiet, aside from the cool wind and the rocking of the carriage. Between that and how late I stayed up last night, I felt a pleasant sleepiness.

“Just let me quit, please.”

“I’ve got PTSD thanks to you.”

“Give it a goddamn rest!”

“Stop expecting me to be like you. Just because you’re physically and mentally strong doesn’t mean everyone else is going to be the same.”

“Takebayashi, come on. You’re the one who’s supposed to teach them, and you have to cover for them better. Hiring new blood isn’t a cakewalk! And we’re not eager to have to retrain these people all over again! You know that, don’t you? Well?!”

“Have you heard? Takebayashi drove another newbie away.”

“Christ, again?! How many years has he been here now? Does he have any idea how to teach people?”

I tried to walk them through everything, but it just made them hate me. In the end, most of them quit. I never threatened them. I was even careful never to yell at them. I was always calm with them, and if they didn’t know something or did something wrong, I would teach them as many times as it took. I avoided giving them more work than they could handle. I assisted them all throughout work hours, only taking a break during break time. I tried many different approaches, but the end result was always the same. I didn’t know what I was doing wrong then, and I didn’t know what I was doing wrong in my new life, either.



“I see it!”

“Hm?”

I must have dozed off for a bit; I’d dreamed of when I was still young, and it reminded me of the concerns I had back then. Having a similar dream again made me feel decades younger. Of course, now I was younger, so it stood to reason.

At any rate, I was still feeling sleepy. I thought I must have been sleeping for a while, but the sun hadn't changed its position too much. Regardless, the gate to Gimul was visible in the distance.

"Finally here..."

"We're back!"

"Thank goodness."

The students were relieved as well, and the mood in the carriage grew just a bit calmer.

"Oh? I see a lot of people outside town," Lucy said. "Doesn't look like they're adventurers, though."

"Yes, it looks like they're surveying something," I guessed.

"They were talking about expanding the city, so I'm sure it has something to do with that," Roche said.

It was still in the planning stages, but the urban development was coming along decently. We passed by the workers and went straight to the guild from the southern gate.

"Welcome back!" The guildmaster greeted us as though he'd been waiting for our arrival. "Students, gather over here! Looks like you all made it back safely. So, did you learn anything on this trip?" The students got together in a corner of the guild and answered his question. "I see. In that case, Roche, you can give us the concluding speech now."

"Got it! Listen up, everyone!"

Roche congratulated the students on making it through the five-day lesson, and expressed hope that they would find this experience useful in the future. After he finished speechifying, he told the students to go report the completion status of the jobs they'd taken, then declared the training meetup over and dismissed everyone.

"Welcome back, Ryoma."

"Hello, Guildmaster."

"How was your first training meetup?"

"Well, I learned a lot from the teachers."

"That's more what I would expect a student to say."

"Still, there were quite a lot of things I managed to learn."

"Well, I suppose you never stop learning, even in old age. Could you come with me for a bit?" The guildmaster beckoned me over in a solemn voice.

"Mind if I come along?"

"Roche? I see no issue. You'll have to give your own report anyway, after all."

We were taken to the guildmaster's office. Firstly, Roche gave a rundown of what happened on the trip, then we got to talking about me. As I sort of expected, it was about what happened after my match.

"I always figured there was something up with Ryoma, but is that

what it was?" The guildmaster rested his elbows on his desk and his head on his hands. looking distressed. "Roche, tell me a little more. How were the people who avoided Ryoma acting?"

"They were afraid at first, but some of them have adjusted their attitudes by now. Most of the students avoided Ryoma, while the older teachers who hadn't already accepted him from the start came to an understanding with him that morning. Most of those who kept avoiding him are on the younger side, including Bosco and a few others as far as the teachers are concerned."

"Bosco has some growing to do. I suppose the others would have panicked when they saw Ryoma's strength as well."

"I'm sorry," I said.

"No need to apologize. You were just showing your skills to help the students. There's nothing condemnable about that, even if the outcome was somewhat unfortunate. So, Roche, what do you make of Ryoma's strength? Be honest."

"Even if I were still in my prime, I wouldn't want to go up against him. If I were Bosco's age and weren't already headed for my retirement, I might have felt the same way as him."

"I heard he beat Howard. Howard can use energy meditation too, can't he?"

"Yes, and I can assure you, he didn't pull any punches."

"I see, interesting. Ryoma."

"Yes?"

The guildmaster took a piece of parchment out of his desk and wrote something down. "Guildmasters have the authority to place limitations on an adventurer's activities, as well as remove certain limitations. One such limitation regards jobs involving bandits. You would have to fight human beings on these jobs, so they're generally only made available to adventurers C-Rank and above. That means restrictions on those jobs are automatically removed when you reach C-Rank, but if you fulfill a few conditions and get the guildmaster's approval, you can accept these jobs at a lower rank."

"Guildmaster?! Are you serious?" Roche argued, but one look from the guildmaster silenced him.

"Roche, I understand how you feel. I agree with everything you've said to Ryoma. I was slightly unsure about what to do with him, but he knows how to take care of himself. I do fear that if he's left to his own devices, eventually he may cross a line. But that would just be part of Ryoma's life. You know that, don't you? As long as parents do everything necessary to set the stage, their children can grow up safely. Conversely, growing up without parents can sometimes lead a child to become an incompetent adult. But as the guildmaster, I have no intention of taking such a role. From the moment he registered,

Ryoma never needed protection. He was able to walk on his own two feet before he got here, and I wanted you to confirm this once and for all. I wanted someone else I trust to give me their opinion on Ryoma. The fact that our opinion is mutual just makes me all the more certain.”

“Was that the idea?”

“Yeah, and I want to help Ryoma, but I don’t want to get in his way,” the guildmaster declared, solemnly handing me a piece of paper. “Ryoma, by my authority as the guildmaster of Gimul’s adventurer’s guild, I permit you to accept requests to hunt bandits. On your way out, show this and your guild card to the receptionist. They’ll mark on your guild card that you’ve gotten my permission. If you use that, you should be able to climb to C-Rank that much faster. But remember that while this lets you fight bandits, I’m not giving you carte blanche to do everything on your own. So find party members if you can. And if you need anything, feel free to ask me. I want to be certain that there are no misunderstandings here.”

“Okay! Understood!” I said.

“Alright, good answer,” the guildmaster said, let go of the paper, and lowered his hand. “Oh, and as far as how some others are treating you, that’s inevitable in a way. The stronger you get, the more of that you’ll see from even the most ordinary people. I wouldn’t worry about it too much; just do what you want to do. As long as you’re not breaking the law, of course.”

I already knew what I wanted to do. “That’s fine, nothing will change with me. I’ll keep taking jobs here as usual,” I said. Whether people were going to avoid me after this or not, I didn’t plan on hiding away in the forest again. It would be impossible for every single person I met to like me, anyway. I’d been lucky enough to meet some great people during my time in this world, but now that I had more opportunities to mingle with a greater breadth of people, this was going to happen eventually. It wasn’t like any existing relationships had ended, so I could keep on living my usual carefree life.

“Nothing will change, eh? For better or worse, I imagine you’ll be proven right.”

“Oh, right, but I’ll think about finding party members.” Roche and the guildmaster were trying to look out for me, after all. I couldn’t say for sure that I’d actually find anyone though, unfortunately.

“Just don’t push yourself too hard,” the guildmaster said, then gave me permission to leave. He looked kind of exhausted.

Chapter 4 Episode 23: New Year's In This World Is Busy Too

Now that I was back in town, I had a lot on my plate. First, I stopped by the laundromat to see what had happened while I was away.

“Boss, welcome back.”

“Hello, Carme.”

Upon coming to Bamboo Forest for the first time in five days, Carme greeted me. He was standing near the employee entrance.

“Were you waiting here for me?”

“I only vaguely knew when you might return, so no. I was watching them.”

“Who?” I looked inside, and saw a few unfamiliar women carrying things around. “Are they new employees?”

“Yes, we hired them for busy periods only, just as we discussed previously.”

“I see.” So they were new part-timers.

“There are a number of other things to report. Please wait in the office.”

There wasn't often that much to report, and reports were normally about routine goings-on at the laundromat, so I wondered what else there could be. I waited in the office until he showed up, carrying a thicker stack of documents than usual.

“Shall I start with the usual income report?”

“Please do.”

This was nothing I hadn't seen before; the numbers all looked normal. Our income hadn't particularly increased, but there didn't seem to be any problems. The list of supplies we needed looked fine as well, so I permitted them to be purchased. There were no issues in the report from the Lenaf branch, either. Carme was on top of most things, so my job mostly involved checking his summaries and giving permission for his plans. Compared to my old job, this was a breeze. Eventually, we got all those documents taken care of.

“Thank you. Next, there were a few messages for you. First, there have been some changes regarding the problems you were concerned about between the slums and the public office.”

“What happened?”

“Ultimately, the public office made some concessions, and the

people of the slums have calmed down.”

“I see.”

That came as something of a relief. I asked for further details, and it sounded like the public office investigated the unlawful use of the town square by the homeless population and decided to allow them to dwell in select places.

“The public office’s general plans haven’t changed, but now they’ve shown that they wouldn’t take the drastic measures the denizens of the slums feared they would. Plus, more of them seem to be accepting the public office’s employment assistance now. A lot of them are still wary and keeping their distance, but it’s safe to say that public relations are improving, slowly but surely.”

It sounded like there would still be issues in future, but the situation had been stabilized for now. I felt like it would be a good time to visit that cafe again, so I could see Arnold; he did say he went there five days a week.

“Anything else?” I asked.

“Serge of the Morgan Trading Company sent you an invitation.”

The invitation was for a meeting with the Jamil family. Just as Roche mentioned yesterday, this was a profitable time for merchants. They got more orders from their regular customers for New Year’s, and the nobles got busy with parties at the same time, so many merchants took this time to send greetings to all the nobles. Serge was acquainted with many nobles, so he needed to get started on contacting them early. He planned to meet with the Jamil family in Gaunago next month, and he was inviting me to come along.

“What do you think?” Carme asked.

“I’m not sure if I should even go. I do appreciate the invitation, though.”

“I understand your concerns. Our business is coming along nicely, but we’re still newcomers. There’s no shortage of merchants seeking a relationship with the duke’s family, so it would be difficult for such a new company to get their attention. Well, at least that would usually be the case, but I believe you’re already on their good side, so I think they could spare some time for you if you so wished. If you can pay them a visit, I don’t see what harm it would do. It’s common to bring guests to these events, and I don’t think you’ll be too conspicuous if you’re attending with Serge. You could be mistaken for a servant, but that happens.”

It would be a simple enough affair apart from that, so I considered taking Carme’s advice. “I’m assuming I need to get dressed up and bring gifts?”

“Yes. For clothes, I’ve found some tailors as well as off-the-shelf clothing stores. I have a list here for you.” He was always one to work

fast. “The question now is, what should you pick for a gift? Most business owners will send something related to their business.”

“All we’d have to offer is deodorizing fluid, really.”

“I can get some wine if you want a safe pick, but I think you would do well to find something more unique to yourself.”

“You might be right.”

We each decided to search for gifts.

“Next, look at this list.”

“Looks like it’s all medicine.”

“Guildmaster Glissela from the merchant’s guild is buying these drugs for a higher price than usual. If you happen to have any or know how to make any, I would very much like for you to take those to the guild. This is the best time to turn a profit for everyone, including us.”

“Are these drugs in higher demand from nobles right now?”

“They’re stocking up in case of emergencies, yes.” I suppose they were rolling in so much dough that they could just do that. “This is the final topic, but Tigger from the equipment store says that the prototype is complete. He wants you to come to his store at your earliest convenience.”

I’d forgotten that I asked him to make adventuring equipment out of slime materials. “Got it, I’ll give him a visit soon.”

“That’s all for my report.”

“Thank you.”

I wrote up a list of tasks. As we got closer to the end of the year, the amount of work was piling up. If I didn’t list it all off now, I’d probably hate myself in the morning. My highest priority was the visit with the duke’s family; I needed to come up with a gift and order some proper attire. Next, I needed to go to Tigger’s store and I also wanted to take the aptitude test at the tamer’s guild. I could probably fit those two tasks into tomorrow’s schedule. And once I got back home, I needed to survey the mine and feed my familiars. I also wanted to experiment with my bloody slimes, but that could wait. I wanted to create a more appropriate space for my mushroom cultivation project as well.

It looked like I was going to be rather busy. After I wrote down everything I could come up with, I got to work on my top priority.



“Is this the place?”

Following the information Carme gave me, I came to a tailor’s store. I could see a few articles of clothing on display in the window. The store didn’t look that big, but the small flower bed outside the entrance gave it a warm vibe, and the balcony on the second story

made it look classy. A lot of care was put into the whole store, and it looked kind of expensive. But the classy attire in this world was apparently made to order in general, so I guess that would have to be expensive.

“Welcome,” a genteel man said as I entered the store. He was wearing something similar to a tuxedo. “You’re Mr. Takebayashi from Bamboo Forest, I take it? I’ve been expecting you.”

“You know who I am?”

“I heard from your assistant. He told me you’re going to meet some nobles and that you need clothes for the occasion. Congratulations.”

Carme had told him while he was researching options, I guess. He was very passionate about this particular task.

“Thank you. I’d like to make an order right away, but may I ask for advice on what sort of outfit would be best?”

“Of course. Look over here.”

Against one wall of the store, many sets of clothes were hung up. I doubted all of them were dress clothes, but they were all made of expensive cloth or leather. And there was a wide variety, too.

“These are all examples, but you can reference these when you pick your preferred style, material, and color,” the man said. “Let’s start with the style. Anything from here to here would encompass most dress clothes.”

He pointed out just a small portion of the clothes on display, but it was still more than I could hold in both arms. I looked at each individual set and found that many of them looked like clothes I saw in textbooks on Earth. And they were from a large range of different eras, too. There was even a fancy lace choker-looking thing, which had a radius of about a meter.

“Is that ruff to your interest?”

“Oh, no, it just jumped out at me because it’s so big. Are these popular with nobles?”

“Yes, my noble customers do like these big ruffs. Many of them use these trivial parts of the outfit to display their wealth. When a merchant is wearing bigger, flashier ruffs than them, they may take offense to that. You will need some appropriate attire, but because you’re young, I would suggest you pick something more reserved.”

“I don’t like to stand out too much anyway, so that’s what I’d prefer.” I wouldn’t even know what to say if he asked me to wear this.

“Then, what do you think of this?”

“This?” The outfit he showed me looked like what a prince would wear in a play.

“These breeches and this hose are both made from high-quality silk. Not only do they look great, but they’re comfortable to wear. The

quilting on this doublet was finely done by a [etc.]... And the slashes on the sleeves don't diminish the elegance of the garment, but may show your strength as an adventurer somewhat..."

His sales pitches were endless. When it became clear that I wasn't interested, he moved on to the next set of clothes. But I couldn't find anything that looked right to me. The knowledge I'd obtained as I came to this world at least helped me understand what he was saying, but my fashion sense was still no better than it was on Earth. I couldn't quite seem to comprehend what made any of these clothes special. But then, something caught my interest.

"Excuse me, are those dress clothes?" I asked.

"These? Yes, this is still the dress clothes shelf, but—"

"Let me see that!"

Something was buried among all the lacy clothes.

"Oh, I knew it."

It was a business suit, what I was most accustomed to back on Earth. Maybe it wasn't quite as formal as what this event called for, but if they were counting it as dress clothes, then that was good enough for me.

"This was the clothing preferred by a king from a few centuries ago," the man explained. "It's said that he popularized these, and they remain popular with some nobles who value tradition. You could wear this anywhere and it would be passable, but it's not exactly in vogue nowadays. Are you sure this is what you want?"

"Yes, this is perfect. I'll take it!" I was so used to wearing suits that nothing else could compete; this was the only option for me.

"Understood. So you would prefer a suit, then. Would you also like it to be white like this example?"

"I'm sorry, but can you do one in black or dark blue?" For me, white suits brought to mind comedians or hosts at a cabaret club.

"Black or dark blue? That would match well with your hair and eyes. How would you like the embroidery to be done?"

"Please make it plain, if possible."

"In that case, you should accessorize it with something. It would add a little more zest."

"What would be a good accessory?"

"Men usually go with rings or armlets. You could also wear a necklace or earrings, but since you're wearing a suit, you could use a tie pin adorned with a jewel."

After that, I still had to choose which material to make the ornament from and what jewel to use. I had no experience with picking out dress clothes in this world, but he explained everything in detail. It all made me feel strangely at ease.



Chapter 4 Episode 24: Spending It All In One Place

Ordering my clothes took a while, but it was still bright out. Next, I went to Tigger's equipment shop.

"Hello!"

"Ryoma? I've got what you asked for," Darson said and went to the back of the store. A while later, he came back with a big wooden box. "This is the finished product."

The box contained two sets of green shirts, pants, and mantles. They looked like ordinary clothes at first glance.

"I had these clothes made from that strong thread you gave me, just like you ordered. I got an armor manufacturer I know to make the stuff, but I checked to make sure he did a good job. These are prototypes, but I'm confident that they're usable." Darson took a strip of cloth and a knife out of the box. "Check this out." He then tried to pierce the strip of cloth, but no matter how many times he cut or stabbed it, he could only damage the surface; he could never slice the cloth or leave a big hole.

"This is made of two layers of cloth weaved from the thread you brought me. Those clothes are all made of the same material, so they should be pretty defensive against bladed weapons. They just look like some regular comfy clothes, but they're actually closer to chain mail. If you wore this under some armor, you'd have some insane defensive power."

"How much does it cost to produce a set?"

"Well, it took some time since the material's so tough, especially when it came to cutting it. But you brought the material yourself, so it costs less than armor made from similar material. Not bad."

"What similar material?"

"Thread from a monster called a metal spider. It's vulnerable to heat and goes soft after warming it a bit, so it's easy to cut. As far as ease of manufacturing goes, that's much better than this stuff. But that ease of use is its weakness. To make up for that, you'd usually use enchantments and compatible materials to supplement the thread and make some magic armor that's resistant to heat and fire. Metal spider thread on its own is fairly expensive, and these additions only add to the price. This armor is fairly costly."

While this armor took time to make, it sounded like good value

for the money. I picked up one of the shirts and noticed that the fabric felt different on the inside compared to the outside. It felt nice and smooth on my fingers.

“Is this silk on the inside?”

“Yeah. That thread wasn’t absorbent in the slightest, and neither was the cloth made from it. So with that in mind, they used silk for the inside of the armor.”

“I see, thank you. I should even be able to wear this in thickets.”

“Not just thickets. These could handle a wolf’s fangs or bladed weapons no problem. Won’t do much for bludgeoning attacks, though.”

“How much for them?”

“Five small gold coins.” For something made-to-order, that was really cheap.

“Are you sure?”

“You gave me the materials for free, and it didn’t take anything special to produce. It just took a while to cut the cloth. The armor manufacturer was happy to work with this rare material, too. Even if I’m charging you for the extra time it took, five small gold coins is more than adequate.”

“I see. Thank you.”

If it was that cheap, I figured it might be nice to give some to all my employees, or the security guards, at the very least. Maybe the duke’s family, too. They probably had security people with their own perfectly good armor already, but if they were stocking up on things like antidotes near the end of the year, maybe they could use this as well. I decided to ask Darson.

“I’d think any noble would already have equipment that’s just as good, but if you gave that as a gift, I doubt they’d be offended,” he said. “And personally, I’d be happy to make more for you as long as you bring the materials and the money. If you want to send a gift, I suggest having an adult-sized set of clothes made so we can use it as an example later. We can use the measurements from that to make properly sized clothes, and I can send you those at a later date. Or you could have your employees come pick them up, whatever works for you. Either way, if you order a whole bunch of sets at once, I’ll give you a discount.”

Thus, I ordered a new set of clothes to use as an example. “I’ll bring the thread for it by tomorrow,” I said.

“Got it. I’ll tell the manufacturer.”

Now I had one candidate for my gift for the Jamil family. But if I wanted to make a lot of sets, I would need an appropriate amount of thread. This would be a good time to get some thread spinning machines or something to use with my sticky slimes. I decided to stop

by Serge's store, and then headed home.



I released my slimes from my Dimension Home, then checked on the mine with my limour birds. I'd only been away for five days, but there were already cave mantises starting to live there. I exterminated them right away and thought about whether to seal the entrance more firmly. But I figured I could use them for food, so I had something to gain in hunting them anyway.

Next, I picked a slightly humid part of the mine and used earth magic to create a simple pedestal. I took the mushroom bed I made the other day out of my Dimension Home and set it there. Strangely, there were already thin mushrooms that looked like enoki growing from the tray. I didn't use magic to accelerate their growth or anything, so they shouldn't have grown so fast. Maybe they were some other type of mushroom than I expected. Still, if they grew, I guess I could consider my mushroom cultivation a success. At any rate, I decided to watch and see what happened for the time being.

I went back out to the mine shaft and installed a door, so no intruders could tamper with the mushrooms. Next, I went to the room I typically used for making waterproof cloth, but this was also a good place for another job. I got my sticky slimes together and lined up the thread spinning machines I'd purchased. I only had space for five of them, but that was probably enough. These were very simplistic devices that looked similar to sewing machines. Spinning the handle on the side of the machine caused the spindle on top of the stand to rotate. By attaching the tip of a thread to an empty spindle, it would naturally wrap itself in thread.

First, I had one slime spit up some string, and spun the handle while I taught the slime what to do. I warned the slime not to let the thread on the spindle get too unbalanced. Next, I let another sticky slime take my place spinning the handle. It didn't take much strength to do, so it seemed to work out fine. A team of two slimes could properly spin thread on their own. I had some slimes take over the other four machines as well, trained them for a while, then left them to their work.

In the meantime, I had another job to do. I listened to the clattering of the spinning wheels as I got some charcoal ready and drew an alchemy circle on the ground. I was about to make a diamond. An ordinary blue suit with no accessories would have been fine as formal attire, but it would have looked too plain on its own, so nobles wouldn't take well to it. It would make me look shabby, and could even possibly cause trouble for the person who'd invited me. That was what the tailor told me, at least. I feel like it was 80% truth

and 20% hype. But to supplement the plain clothes, I decided to put everything into an extremely expensive accessory.

Still, even this suit, which he kept calling plain, cost me five hundred thousand sute, or fifty small gold coins. That was a lot of money, but other clothes there could cost two or three times as much. Clothes worn by the wealthiest nobles would even be paid for in platinum coins, with accessories included. The inflated prices these nobles paid were absurd, but at least they were spending that money on something instead of hoarding it. At any rate, if I was going to meet with nobles, I wanted to do what I could as a commoner to match their status as closely as I could.

But the question was how to go about doing that. I didn't normally wear jewels and didn't care for the idea of wearing a whole bunch of them to flaunt my wealth. I came to the conclusion that I should go with one large, expensive jewel. Finding an expensive jewel would be harder, though, so I could make one instead. That way I could say it was an heirloom from my grandmother.

First, I separated the carbon from the impure substances in the charcoal, then bonded it. Like graphite, diamonds are allotropes of carbon; they're essentially clumps of pure carbon. The difference between graphite and diamonds comes down to how the carbon atoms are bonded. That makes diamonds harder, more transparent, and better for transferring heat and insulating against electricity.

I put my knowledge into action as I focused on the shining magic circle, transforming the carbon powder into one transparent lump. I waited for the light to subside, leaving only the distorted lump. Then I cast Appraisal on it.

Bloom diamond: *A special diamond containing no impure material.*

Color: *None.*

Weight: *218.34 grams = 1091.7 carats.*

It seemed to have turned into a diamond, but I didn't know what the bloom part meant. The description said this diamond was special, so I was curious. It would be best to ask someone trustworthy about it.

Also, the weight of the diamond was clearly unusual. 0.2 grams was equal to one carat on Earth, and the biggest diamond in the world was around five or six-hundred carats. But this diamond was 1091.7 carats. I figured I must have used too much carbon. In any case, I decided to divide it into pieces and adjust their shape and size.

Chapter 4 Episode 25: Mystery of the Jewel

The next day, I visited the Merchant's Guild a bit late in the morning.

"Welcome. What business do you have here today?"

"I heard from Guildmaster Glissela the other day, and..."

I'd made some of the medicines on the list the night before. As long as I was here to sell them, I figured I would ask to meet with Glissela.

"If it isn't Master Takebayashi! Welcome to the Merchant's Guild."

An employee who I had met a few times before led me to the reception room. They remembered me well, apparently.



"Hello there. Here to sell medicine?" Glissela asked as I entered. Her guess about my reason for coming was definitely half-right.

"Good guess."

"I asked you for some, after all. I was fairly confident that you'd be able to deliver. Also, I heard that you went to a training course at the Adventurer's Guild. Once I heard that was over, I estimated the amount of time it'd take you to make the medicine. I suspected it would be either today or tomorrow."

Her foresight was as eerie as ever. But that wasn't the only reason I came to the Merchant's Guild.

"I wanted to ask you for some advice as well, actually."

"Oh? Then let's get the medicine out of the way first."

"Thank you," I said, then opened my Item Box and took out fifty bottles of medicine. "I made what I could with the materials I had. I still have some grell frog materials left over."

"If I provided some additional materials, would you make more?"

"Sure, if I know how to make it."

Glissela appraised a random bottle and snorted. "Was there anything on that list you couldn't make?"

"There were some for which I knew the recipe, but I'd never actually made them before. I wanted to hear your opinion on those."

"I see. I looked over some of what you did make, and they should all be effective enough. I don't see anything to complain about. I'll

give you the materials you need if you'll bring me the rest of what's on the list next time."

"Understood."

Glissela called an employee over and ordered them to assess and store the medicine, then prepare my reward and the materials I needed. The employee accepted the orders and left the room.

"So, what else did you want to talk about?" Glissela asked.

"Bloom diamonds," I said. Her eyes seemed to narrow a bit at that. "Do you know what those are?"

"When you've done my job for as long as I have, you're bound to know. Do you have one?"

"It's an heirloom from my grandmother. She told me to sell it if I ever needed money." I also told her about the formal wear I was preparing. "I was thinking I could use that jewel as an accessory, but I'm unsure how valuable it is and whether it's a good choice."

"Smart boy. Better that you talk to me first about this before anyone else. Do you have it on you now?"

I took a cloth bundle out of my Item Box and handed it over. It contained one fragment of the bloom diamond, about the size of my thumbnail. Breaking up and carving pieces of the diamond did not change what the Appraisal spell told me, so presumably it was accurate. The guildmaster unraveled the cloth and gazed at the jewel, then cast Appraisal on it. She sighed immediately afterward.

"Is it fake?" I asked.

"No, it's real. This is quite the large bloom jewel you have here. It has the right transparency and everything. Not only that, but it's a diamond, and a beautifully colorless one at that. Could be more refined, but it's still a fine piece of work."

When I asked for more information, she explained that 'Bloom' was a term for a certain class of jewel, and that it meant 'Special' in some old language.

"So this is a top-class item?" I asked.

"Not top-class, just special. Most jewels you'd see have little grains of sand, minor scratches, and some cavities inside."

Now that she mentioned it, I remembered how jewels that are naturally created would have some bits of dirt or empty cavities inside. But I made mine with alchemy, so there was none of that.

"You don't know what bloom means, but you know all that?" Glissela asked after I explained this.

"I just remembered it."

"It's strange how much common knowledge eludes someone as well-read as you. Well, at least I don't have to explain that part. Yes, this jewel doesn't have any of those imperfections. That's what makes it a bloom jewel. But they don't produce jewels like this nowadays."

“Didn’t they use to, though?”

“Nobody knows if the old jewels were always like that or if they were clean pieces cut from ordinary jewels, but they were apparently being made long before I was born. They’ve been found in ruins, or among the national treasures of some old countries. I’ve heard that when one finds its way to the market, every noble tries to get their hands on it. Most of the ones that still exist are probably treated as family heirlooms.”

If they existed in the past, that meant that someone had used alchemy to create jewels in the past as well. Maybe it was another person from Earth, like the Alchemy King the gods told me about. This was something I wanted to look into when I had time.

“Would it be gauche to use this as an accessory?” I asked.

“I wouldn’t worry about that. You sure don’t want to go around telling everyone about it, but you’re just going to visit the Jamil family, aren’t you? I doubt it’ll cause any problems. Even if you happened to draw the eyes of some sketchy noble, it’s unlikely to lead to any sudden violence. They’ll just ask to buy it off you, in which case you might as well sell it. You say it’s an heirloom, but you’re not really that attached to it, are you?”

“You could tell?”

“It’s not hard to tell,” Glissela said with a grin. She didn’t elaborate on that, but I guess my claims were suspicious. I decided not to try and explain myself, in case I made things worse. “Well, if it worries you, selling the diamond as soon as possible would be better than hiding it. Less trouble that way.”



In other words, the fact that I owned it meant it was already too late either way. If so, there was no reason not to use it as an accessory. As for the rest of the diamond, I considered crushing it up and feeding it to a slime. That, or giving it to the Jamil family.

“Excuse me, the reward and the materials are ready,” the employee said as they returned. Glissela shoved the diamond back to me, probably to say that I should pocket it quickly. “Come in,” she said after I hid the diamond from sight.

Three employees entered. One had a heavy leather sack, while the other two had bags of varying sizes. They emptied the bags onto the table, handed a piece of paper to Glissela, and left the room. Glissela looked down at the paper for a while, nodded, and held it out to me.

“Check the reward and the materials to see if they’re correct,” she said. I was being paid three thousand sute per bottle of medicine.

“Isn’t this a little too much?”

“Quality antidotes are going to be in high demand for a while, and most of those customers are all nobles and rich people. But we don’t want them to buy up everything and keep medicine out of the hands of people who really need them, so we need our manufacturers to work extra hard. You provided high-quality medicine at the perfect time of year, so I think this is an appropriate reward. But the value of medicine will drop back to normal in other seasons, so you’ll want to make those materials into medicine quickly.”

“Understood.” I didn’t plan on leaving town for a while, so I intended to do that soon.

“By the way, Ryoma, I hear that Worgan gave you permission to fight bandits.”

“Where did you hear that?”

“From the man himself. He brought it up while we were discussing something else. So you’re interested in taking those sorts of jobs?”

“Combat is my specialty, after all. Fighting humans is no problem for me, either.”

“I know. That’s probably why he gave you permission in the first place. In that case, you should visit the Merchant’s Guild more often. Bandits have an effect on our work too, you know. My information network should be helpful for you.”

“I suppose so. Thank you.”

“Use everything at your disposal; that’s what merchants do. If you can use that information to hunt down bandits, we stand something to gain from it too.”

I took Glissela’s advice into account.



“Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it.”

I thanked the clerk from yesterday, gave him the diamond, and left the store. Unlike me, he seemed to know the value of a bloom diamond. Considering his job, he probably knew a lot about jewels. The instant I showed it to him and said I wanted to use it, he seemed to know it was something special. And after he picked it up and gave it a look, his attitude changed. His already polite behavior seemed to become even more polite. He did charge me an extra fee to keep the bloom diamond a secret, but I was also saving money from providing my own jewel, so it all worked out. Plus, I now knew what to watch out for when making jewels, so it was a small price to pay for that knowledge.

Next on my schedule, I had the familiar aptitude exam that Roche told me about. I wanted to enjoy a leisurely walk there, but arrived in very little time. The Tamer’s Guild was closer to that store than I thought.

“Hello, I heard that I can take a familiar aptitude exam here. Would I be able to take one today?” I asked at the reception desk.

“Welcome to the Tamer’s Guild. The familiar aptitude exam? Yes, you can take it today. Show me your guild card, please.” I presented my guild card. “Oh? You’ve never taken it before?”

“No. I had familiars before I ever registered.”

“I see. Your first exam is free, so just take this to Gimul’s east gate,” the receptionist said and handed me a document together with my guild card.

“The east gate?”

“Yes. The aptitude exam involves attempting to make contracts with a variety of monsters provided by the guild. We look for trends in your results to determine what monsters you have the greatest aptitude for. For that, we need enough space to accommodate a lot of monsters. The east gate is connected to our lodging facility for large monsters, and we store our aptitude test monsters there as well.”

“Thank you, I understand. I’ll head there right away.”

“I’m glad I could be of service. Good luck.”

Thus, I headed to the east gate. Come to think of it, I’d never gone that way before.

Chapter 4 Episode 26: Monster Aptitude And Past Achievements

“Alright, you may pass. Good luck on the exam.”

“Thank you.”

The guard didn’t seem to understand that this exam wasn’t a pass-or-fail gambit, but offered his encouragement all the same as I exited through the east gate. What I saw looked distinct from the north or south gates. Wooden fences stood on each side of the road. There were pens containing cows and horses, and there were even large monsters I had never seen before. It felt like a farm.

I walked a bit further to a large building that belonged to the Tamer’s Guild. A tower that looked like a silo was next to it, so I could really only see this place as a farm. Many of the people there were in work clothes, and if I didn’t know any better, I would have thought this was a rest area. Right in front of me as I entered the building, the people standing at the reception desk were in casual and comfortable outfits.

“This way, please!” a woman at the reception desk said. She seemed to think I was lost.

“Nice to meet you. I heard that this is where I can take the familiar aptitude exam. Here are my documents, and here’s my guild card.”

“I’ll take those, thank you. Ryoma Takebayashi? I see this is your first time. The meeting grounds are back there. Just go straight down the hall and enter the room at the dead end. Then give this to an employee, as long as they’re not busy with anything.”

“Thank you.”

I followed the path to the left and entered the room at the end of the hall. There were benches on the right side of the room and five counters on the left. It was like a waiting room at a bank. I didn’t see a lot of people waiting for the aptitude exam, though. Only two of the counters were open and taking customers, and only one person was waiting on a bench.

“Oh, sit down at an open counter and wait your turn, please,” a woman said and rang a bell, presumably to call an employee. I sat at the counter closest to the front of the room right around when I heard a door open on the other side of the counter.

“Sorry about—Oh? Ryoma?”

“Mr. Smit! Why are you here?”

“This is part of the Tamer’s Guild, you know. I do work here sometimes when I come around for inspections. It’s the only chance I get to speak to the young people, and I forget what it’s like for the low-level employees otherwise. So you’re here for an aptitude exam? That reminds me, I don’t think I recommended that you take one when you first registered.”

“I went straight to the Adventurer’s Guild after that, so that’s probably why. I also had no intention of trading out my familiars for different ones. And I still don’t, honestly.”

“That’s fine, but it doesn’t hurt to know what monsters you’re compatible with,” Taylor said, then wrote something down on a document and pointed to a door across from the one I entered through. “Let’s get started right away. We have some monsters for exam purposes back there.”

On the other side of the counters, there were two adjacent doors. When I passed through one, I smelled something rotten. It was like I was at a zoo, or maybe a pet shop. There were many small cages in the room that contained a wide variety of monsters. There were slimes, of course, as well as small rats and cave bats that I’d seen plenty of since coming to this city. There were even crew birds like the one I formed a contract with before.

“This is where we keep the small monsters. There are medium-sized monsters a little further back, and space for large monsters even further back than that,” Taylor explained as he entered through the other door. “As you can see, we have quite a number of different monsters to work with. I’ll be having you try to form contracts with them, but we can skip the slimes and limour birds. Have you made contracts with any other monsters?”

“I did it with a crew bird one time, just for practice.”

“Did you have any trouble with that? Did it follow your orders? Could you understand its feelings?”

“No, I had no issues. I could even see through its eyes.”

“If you could do that after practicing one time, it sounds like you could be compatible with crew birds,” Taylor said and jotted something down. I peered at his notes. They listed the names of many different monsters. “You curious about how this works?”

“Yes, a little bit,” I answered honestly.

Taylor faintly smiled. “I use this chart to record whether you were able to form a contract with a monster, then ask how it felt to you if you were successful in order to rate your level of compatibility with that specific monster. We analyze those results for any commonalities, and then figure out what monsters would work best for you. That’s why we have this room full of monsters. Forming a contract with all

of them would take a lot of time and magical energy, but for most people, we can figure out their aptitude without having to go through all that. Most tamers will be satisfied after finding that they're broadly compatible with insect types, mammal types, bird types, or some such other class of monster. What takes more time is figuring out which specific monsters you're best suited to within your specialty class, or if there's some more unique criteria in your specific case. That's how it is with the Jamil family, for example."

"That's true. Reinhart's most compatible with four-legged monsters, Elise is compatible with wolf monsters, and Reinbach is compatible with scaly monsters, if I'm remembering right."

"That's right. Lady Elise has an aptitude for mammal types, but she's most compatible with wolf monsters and can form contracts with any monster of that variety. She can also possess a far greater number of such familiars than average. Reinhart can form contracts with any four-legged monster regardless of type. The only class of monster he can't have as a familiar is bird types." That reminded me of back when I got my limour birds. Elia's limour birds wouldn't even let Reinhart get near them.

"What about Reinbach?"

"He's something else entirely, like a combination of everything good about Reinhart and Elise's aptitude without any downsides. He can form contracts with anything from lizardmen to dragons as long as they have scales, and he can possess a lot of familiars too. But unlike his son, he can also form contracts with some monsters of any type. There are some that he's worse with than others, but not to a point that it's detrimental."

"I knew that Reinbach uses dragons, but I wasn't sure exactly how great his abilities are. That sounds pretty impressive."

"You didn't know? There are whole books about him. I thought the whole country knew."

"Really?!"

"Sounds like you've been living under a rock."

"I heard he's done some great things in combat in the past and that he's on a level greater than Elise, but that's about it."

"The most famous stories about him would revolve around his fights, yes. And he is certainly on another level. Nobody compares to him."

"Why is that?"

"There are special monsters known as divine beasts that have been blessed by the gods. The gods charged each of them with the duty of protecting different lands, which they have guarded as their personal turf since ancient times. No human can compare to their power, of course, and they're even greater than the monsters we classify as S

Rank.”

“And you’re telling me that Reinbach has formed a contract with one of these monsters?”

“That’s correct. It was back when he was a young man in the military. One of this country’s borders is drawn upon the Fire Dragon Mountains,” Taylor said and gazed off into the distance.

“There are still a number of active volcanoes there, so it’s harsh territory for humans. The center of the Fire Dragon Mountains is a divine beast’s turf, and many other powerful monsters thrive there as well. But many jewels and magic stones can be found there too; it’s a treasure trove of valuable resources. Seeking those resources, a neighboring nation once sent troops to the area. Those troops incurred the wrath of the divine beast, and they were swiftly wiped out. If it had ended there, that country would simply have gotten their just desserts, but only humans concern themselves with the borders we draw. The divine beast became hostile to both of our countries, and its dragon servants went on a rampage all around the border. The army was sent to protect the country, one of the squads being led by Reinbach.”

“And that’s when he formed a contract with the divine beast?”

“Yes, that was the only solution. It costs many lives to slay a single dragon, but there were up to a dozen at once on the battlefield. They say that attempting to fight would have brought about our demise. Thankfully, they took a gamble on using taming magic to negotiate instead. And because of his high compatibility and prestigious family, Reinbach was selected to be the negotiator. Nobody expected it to work, though.”

“But he was able to negotiate with the divine beast?”

“Yes. Thankfully, it was intelligent enough to negotiate with. There were fairy tales that said as much, but Reinbach was probably the first to confirm it. According to Reinbach, the divine beast demanded that the humans do something to prevent their fellow humans from attacking again in the future.”

He continued. After that, the army set its sights on the neighboring country instead. Nobody stood a chance against the dragons, so it was the safer option. Rifall’s troops had greater morale, and because they first chose to negotiate rather than fight, they didn’t suffer as many casualties previously. The other nation did try to fight the dragons, so their numbers were greatly diminished and their morale was at rock bottom. The results were predictable. The battle lasted not even three days before the enemy retreated from the Fire Dragon Mountains.

“There were a lot of political issues between those countries after that, but a conflict with the divine beast and the dragons was

successfully avoided. Reinbach was permitted to keep his contract with the divine beast, he formed contracts with the dragons as well, and we were given the right to collect resources in the area, as long as we did no harm to the divine beast's turf."

"That's a heck of a story."

"No kidding. Simply gaining safe access to the resources in the Fire Dragon Mountains would be an incredible feat in itself, to say nothing of the many powerful dragons he now commands."

Reinbach's existence had an influence on much of society, both politically and militarily. His nobility and his achievements made him such a major player in the world that it became difficult for him to work within an organization. In the end, he left the army.

"If he were to sincerely support some faction or other, it would utterly destroy the power balance between factions and cause a great deal of needless chaos. Right around when this was taking place, something unfortunate happened to his older brother. He focused all his attention on taking his brother's place as the head of Jamil's territory, distancing himself from politics and the military."

"Sounds like he's had quite a remarkable life. I can hardly even imagine it," I said, meaning every word. One thing was for sure: Reinbach was even more OP than me.

Chapter 4 Episode 27: Exam Results And A New Slime

“Oops, this is no time to be talking about that,” Taylor said, looking down at his chart. “You own more than a thousand slimes, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Slimes are easy to make contracts with for everyone, but that’s still a lot. I feel like this is going to take us a while. Shall we begin?”

“I’m ready. How many monsters can most people make contracts with, by the way?”

“The person who had the most contracts with monsters, to my knowledge, owned about three hundred chainbugs. But for most people, even twenty is a lot. Few people would even bother to make contracts with that many slimes, so it’s hard to know what’s normal for them, but I’ve never heard of anyone having over a thousand of any monster.”

If so, then my number of familiars was off the charts. With that cleared up, we began the exam.



“Hm, I see.”

Two hours later. I attempted to make contracts with countless monsters. Even when it came to just bird monsters, there were sparrow types, eagle types, owl types, and more that I had to form and break contracts with over and over. The same went for insects, fish, mammals, and reptiles.

All of my attempts were successful. As far as we could find, there were no monsters that I couldn’t form contracts with. Compared to slimes, however, I had trouble giving commands to most of the monsters. They wouldn’t do what I said most of the time, so I seemed to be better with some monsters than others. The problem was, I didn’t understand how it was determined which monsters worked best for me. All I knew about many of these monsters were their name or appearance, which I only learned just before making the contract. I knew nothing about their ecology. For the monsters that I had never seen before, I had nothing but questions. But Taylor seemed to have an idea.

“Ryoma, it looks like you’re compatible with monsters that have a tendency to form groups.”

“So more social monsters, then?”

“Most likely. Based on all the monsters you’ve been compatible with, I can see a trend there. Limour birds flock together. For slimes, I’m sure you’ve found something in your research that comes to mind. Another possibility is that you have an affinity for monsters that birth many children at once. This trend isn’t as consistent as the other, but it’s shared among many of these monsters. I’d explain what I mean for each individual monster, but that would take far too long. I’ll introduce you to a book on monsters that you can read for more details. You could buy a copy yourself, or you can read it for free in the guild’s reference room. Knowledge of monsters should also help with your adventuring work.”

“Thank you, I’ll keep that in mind. But I do wonder why I’m good with monsters that form groups specifically. What causes trends like that?”

“It’s caused by an individual’s unique traits and ways of thinking, they say. What that really means, though, is that we have no clear idea as to the cause. It’s a fair assumption that it’s because of some unique part of you. What’s important isn’t how your compatibility works; it’s what you do now that you have the knowledge. If you’re going to be expanding the scope of your work in the future, you might do well to find monsters that can assist with your goals.”

“I’d like to find a monster that I can ride.”

I had previously had the idea of making a bike with metal slimes for wheels. But they would roll around using their own weight and stop moving when I got on, so it turned out to be a failure. If I just wanted something to ride, then a huge slime would work, but it would be pretty conspicuous, and that wasn’t something I wanted from my means of transportation. While I could figure out a way to do most things using slimes, transportation was unfortunately not one of them, and making up for that was my own problem.

“The idea was recommended to me by an adventurer I was working with the other day, and it got me kind of interested. I also got permission from the Adventurer’s Guild to hunt bandits, so maybe I’ll be taking jobs at more distant locations.”

“I see. Transportation is generally done with horse monsters. You can ride them or have them pull carriages. They’re also social monsters, so you should be compatible with them. If you’re able to communicate through taming magic, it should make the coachman’s job that much easier.”

He also told me that if I wanted to travel greater distances in a single day, I’d want a type with excellent stamina. My choices would

vary depending on the weight of what I might want to transport, or how far I wanted to travel. Taylor taught me that tamers needed to know monsters well, take advantage of their strengths, and compensate for their weaknesses. If I wanted some new familiars, the best first step would be to study.



We must have talked for a while, because when I left the guild, the sun was starting to set. But it was worth it. Not only did I now know my aptitude, but I got to see a lot of different monsters, and I came up with ideas for ways to use my slimes in the future. Now I just had to check the laundromat and head home.

“Boss, perfect timing,” Carme said as I entered. Something special had happened, according to him. I waited in the office until he brought me an unfamiliar wooden box.

“What’s this?” I asked.

“It contains a high-ranking slime. Most likely of a variety that you don’t own yet.”

“A slime? Sounds interesting, but how did it end up here?”

“It was brought to us just a moment ago. Somebody found it on the road to the mine. Did you ever purchase a slime from someone before?”

“I bought a bloody slime from some adventurers once.”

“I think this person heard about that and brought the slime expecting money in return. It was all rather sudden, but this is a slime I hadn’t seen you with before and I assumed you would want it, so I decided to buy it.”

“Thank you for being so considerate, I appreciate it. How much did it cost?”

“A thousand sute.”

“That’s surprisingly cheap.”

“It’s a slime, after all. It doesn’t seem like it can use magic either, so most places would have paid less, or refused to buy it at all. The person who brought it probably feels good about what they got right now.”

“Really? Well, that’s cool, I suppose.”

“If something like this were to happen again in the future, should I buy the slimes offered?”

“Sure, as long as you don’t lose your shirt.”

“As you wish. Right, if anyone brings us slimes, I’ll let them in for negotiations. Could you give me a list of the slimes you currently own? It would help me to decide whether to buy the slime and how much to pay.”

“Sure, no problem.”

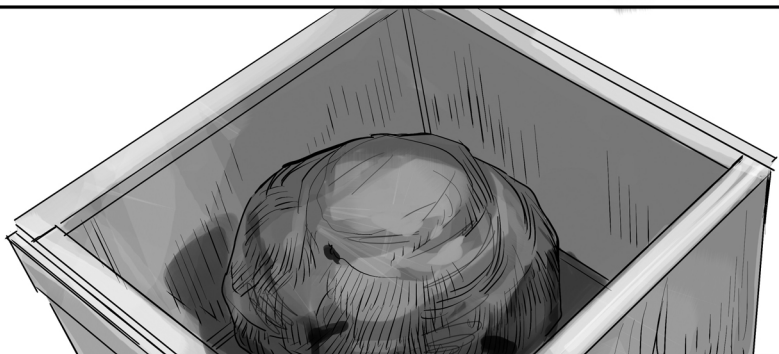
“Also, Bell, the nun, has a message for you. Grass has grown from the slime they’re keeping at the church and the children are worried that it may have caught something. She’d like you to come check on it when you have the time.”

“Does it seem sick?”

“It doesn’t sound like it’s acting sick. It just sprouted grass from its body.”

“Maybe it evolved, then. Alright, I’ll head right there.”

Thus, I decided to stop by the church on the way home. But first I wanted to check the slime in the box. Once I confirmed there were no more messages for me, I opened the lid.



What I found inside appeared to be an ordinary stone the size of a fist. I was worried that we had been tricked for a moment, but I doubted that Carme would be so easily fooled. I cast the contract spell before it might have had the chance to jump out, and it worked. This was undoubtedly a monster. I cast Monster Appraisal on it.

Stone Slime

Skills: Harden 2, Physical Attack Resistance 2, Consume 3, Absorb 3, Split 3, Camouflage 10

It was certainly a slime. Its skills were close to that of a metal or iron slime, but neither of those possessed the Camouflage skill. That skill was at an especially high level, too. It was similar to how the bloody slimes could just look like puddles of blood if they sat still. This slime was indistinguishable from an ordinary rock, so I had no idea how it was found.

“He was getting along poorly with a coworker and happened to kick it out of frustration,” Carme explained. “He said he was surprised that the rock moved.”

“He got pretty lucky, then.”

The food for this slime would obviously have to be rocks. I did need to find out if it had preferences for certain types of rocks, though. I picked up a few random rocks to see what the slime would do.

“Boss, I have to get going now.”

“Oh, right. Thank you.”

Carme got back to work, while I spent some time thinking about the stone slime.

Chapter 4 Episode 28: A Promise At Church

I was called to the divine realm at the church as per usual, where I drank with Gain, Kufo, and Tekun as we discussed recent events.

“You were on the way back from a monster aptitude exam, you say?” Gain asked.

“Yeah, and when I stopped by my store, I found out that someone had come by to sell a stone slime. Not only that, but I heard that something weird was going on with the church’s pet slime, so I came to see it, and it turned out that it evolved into a weed slime. It was a lucky day for me.”

“Those both use camouflage, so they’re pretty hard to find. Not bad,” Kufo said.

“But Ryoma, wasn’t that weed slime a pet for those kids? Did they cry to you about it?” Tekun asked.

“It all worked out somehow. Some of the kids were disappointed, but the weed slime also seemed to have the power to make weeds grow all around it, and it was covering the church garden with weeds. I appraised it and learned that its Split skill was Lv.8, so it would multiply insanely fast. I convinced the nuns to let me take it off their hands, promising to take good care of it, of course.”

“Yeah? Glad there’s not too many hurt feelings over it. Time for another drink, you’re just about out,” Tekun said with a hearty laugh, then pulled a bottle from out of nowhere and poured it. I frantically caught it in my glass and gulped it all down at once. It had a mellow grape flavor. “Anyway, seems like you’ve gotten pretty used to being called to the divine realm.”

“It happens every time you pray at church, after all,” said Kufo.

“You must have met some more gods in the process too,” said Gain.

“You, Kufo, Lulutia, Tekun, and Fernobelias are the only ones I’ve met.”

“What, you haven’t even met half of us?” Tekun asked.

“I know Manoailoa’s name just from the basic knowledge I was given, at least. I haven’t actually met them, though. What is Manoailoa like?”

“That’s not an easy question to answer,” Kufo said.

“You don’t have to answer if it’s too much trouble.”

"No, I wouldn't say that, but I haven't seen Manoailoa in years."

"Same here," said Tekun.

"Nor have I," said Gain.

"What?! I assumed all the gods met with each other."

"Manoailoa tends to wander around a lot. Not outside of the divine realm, but I couldn't tell you what he's up to right now."

"Manoailoa is the god of the arts, and he presents himself in many ways," said Kufo. "Sometimes he dresses perfectly normally, and sometimes he looks entirely bizarre. He gets bored easily, too. Manoailoa is a weird god."

"Reminds me of way back when Manoailoa started walking around naked, saying that's what natural beauty is," said Tekun.

"Oh, I remember that! Wouldn't even wear a loincloth. Lulutia and Kiriluel weren't happy about that."

Gods were quite a diverse bunch, from the sound of it.

"Where's Lulutia, by the way?"

"She wanted to have a girls' day out with just the goddesses, something like that."

"She got the idea from Earth, apparently," said Tekun. "I don't see the point myself."

"She was bemoaning how few goddesses came," said Gain. "She should be spending time with a nice and caring goddess right now."

"Do you mind if I change the subject a bit? There's something I want to ask you and Kufo."

"Of course," said Gain.

"Did something happen?" said Kufo.

"I mentioned how I took the monster aptitude exam before I came here, right? I learned that I'm compatible with monsters that form groups. You're the ones who gave me my taming knowledge and abilities, so maybe you can explain this. I can also make contracts with an abnormal number of slimes. Is there a reason for that?"

Gain and Kufo thought about it. "We didn't make your abilities that way on purpose, but I suppose it has something to do with us," said Gain.

"We decided to give you the ability to use taming magic, but we never had any specifics in mind when it came to what monsters you can make contracts with," said Kufo. "So we didn't do anything with your monster aptitude. We just left that to you, I'm pretty sure."

"So my monster aptitude is just something that was inherent to me from the start?"

"I don't know, maybe it's more just something you desired."

"We gave you abilities that you wanted, that much is true," said Gain. "Presumably your desires should be reflected in your skill set. That may have had an effect on some things. It's also why you're so

compatible with slimes, I think.”

“So if I had wanted to make contracts with dragons, would I have higher compatibility with them?”

“If you really wanted to, yes. If it was just a passing fancy, that’s not enough.”

“I guess I wanted slimes, then. That sort of makes sense.”

“Well, your powers were granted to you upon arriving in the Forest of Gana, so that would be when your monster aptitude was determined. If you researched and took an interest in other monsters later, that wouldn’t change your aptitude. Nor are we going to change such things.”

“And if anything were going to change, I doubt it’d be your aptitude for social monsters. Your focus on slimes would be more likely to change than that, probably because of your environment in your past life,” Kufo said.

“What do you mean?”

“It’s hard to explain, but I mean, you lived a pretty lonely life on Earth, right? You were part of a company, so you had coworkers and subordinates, but I feel like you weren’t that close with many people.”

“Well, that’s true.”

“You didn’t go out of your way to join groups, and you were okay on your own, but it’s not like you were uninterested in joining any group. Those desires can sometimes be unconscious, and that may have affected your monster aptitude.”

“Oh, I get it. Wait, that’s depressing!”

It made sense, but hearing it from someone else kind of hurt. Especially coming from a god, about as accurate a source as I could ask for.

“That’s life, kid,” Tekun said with a chuckle. He offered me another drink, which I guzzled down all at once. “Sure it’s depressing, but it means you can make contracts with all kinds of monsters, and huge numbers of them too. Look at the bright side.”

“Fair enough. I can’t say I’m disappointed.” I wasn’t entirely satisfied either, but I couldn’t complain about my monster aptitude. I wanted to change the subject, though. “I heard that Reinbach Jamil has a contract with a divine beast, but what are divine beasts, anyway? From what I was told, they’re monsters that were blessed by the gods and given the duty of protecting some territory, or something.”

“That’s accurate,” Kufo said. “Rifall actually has a human with a contract with one, so it makes sense that they’d know about that.”

“Are the lands they protect important to the gods?”

“Yes, but they are also important to the world and its denizens,” Gain said. “The divine beasts’ turf is also referred to as holy lands.”

They're needed for the production of magical energy in this world."

"Very interesting. Do you mind telling me more about holy lands?"

"I'd be happy to. They have something to do with why you came to this world, actually."

"They're something you ought to know about, really," Kufo said. "You'll be dealing with them more in the future."

"I will?"

"Oh, I guess we should explain more about what they are first. Nothing too complicated." As he tried to think through what he wanted to say, Kufo began to slowly explain. "First off, this world has magical energy. It's used by both humans and monsters. You already know that much, right?"

"And more is consumed than produced, so you've been transferring magical energy from Earth, right? That's also the reason I came to this world."

"Correct. Unfortunately, we don't have enough supply to meet the demand, but our world is still trying to produce as much magical energy as it can. And specifically, magical energy is generated by the natural environment. Plants, rocks, rivers, and valleys all have a lot to do with the production of magical energy. It can happen in ordinary forests, and it even happens to some extent in human cities. But it's more efficient in places with more nature, so the amount of energy coming out of cities is pretty minor."

"Magical energy is generated from all places in this world," Gain continued. "Holy lands produce an especially large quantity, and they're quite efficient at it. To be a holy land, it must be a place that hasn't been tampered with by humans, it must be above a certain size, and it must be full of nature."

"So if humans come upon a holy land, or monsters that aren't supposed to be there, they can cause trouble. To prevent that, we have had special monsters protect those lands since ancient times."

That made sense, and I was starting to see how I fit into this. I was about to go to a place full of nature that was hard for humans to tamper with.

"Is the Sea of Trees of Syrus a holy land?"

"The very center of it, yeah. The magical energy from that holy land fills the Sea of Trees with valuable herbs and ore. There's no divine beast there, though."

"So not every holy land has a divine beast? Is this one unsafe, then?"

"Humans don't go anywhere near it, so it's fine. Just because there's no divine beast doesn't mean the place is unprotected. Fernobelias have taken care of."

“You sound pretty confident, considering you’re not even protecting it yourself.”

“Well, Fernobelia’s in charge of the Sea of Trees of Syrus. I told him I could put a divine beast there, but he said that would be too easy. He just uses decently powerful monsters and the environment itself to protect the place. What do you think about that?”

“This seems pretty important, but it sounds like he’s looking at it like doing a challenge run on a game.”

“Okay, I know what a game is, but what’s a challenge run?”

“Like, deliberately refusing to use certain tools or placing other limitations on yourself, then trying to win a game like that.”

“Oh, yeah! That’s exactly what it’s like!”

“You agree?!”

“I wouldn’t really say he’s just screwing around, but Fernobelia likes to do things the hard way. He always says that he specializes in highly detailed work, and he thinks the way I handle my holy lands is sloppy.”

It sounded like Kufo had gotten into arguments with Fernobelia about this before. He went on complaining about this until it was time for me to leave. But I learned something about the Sea of Trees of Syrus, so it all worked out.

Chapter 4 Episode 29: Abnormality

-Slime Observation Record-

Today I acquired two new slimes as familiars. Here's what I know about them.

Stone Slime

Skills: Harden 2, Physical Attack Resistance 2, Consume 3, Absorb 3, Split 3, Camouflage 10

This slime looks like a rock that you'd find anywhere. As you'd imagine, it only eats rocks. I've yet to notice any preferences when it comes to the type of rock or the minerals contained within. But when I feed it a rock, it becomes the same color as that rock and even emulates the texture. As a test, I closed my eyes, rolled around on the ground a bit, and opened my eyes again, and it took me a while to find the slime. I was able to in the end, thanks to my contract with it, but finding it with my eyes alone would have been a challenge. Another experiment taught me that it has a preference for earth energy, and that its body is affected by earth magic. Going forward, I'd like to obtain more stone slimes and feed them some ore, jewels, and magic crystals to see what happens.

Weed Slime

Skills: Vitality Enhancement 5, Photosynthesis 5, Consume 1, Absorb 1, Growth Acceleration 5, Split 8, Camouflage 9

Much like the stone slime, the weeds that grow from this slime's body can be found anywhere outside. If it hid in a thicket, it would be difficult to detect. It subsists on weeds. I showed it some medicinal and poisonous herbs I had in stock, but it showed no interest. It did, however, eat the grainspear grass I collected during the training meetup. Maybe that counts as a weed? Or maybe this specific weed slime happens to like grains? It's still unclear, so I'd like to obtain more weed slimes and compare them. Thankfully, I can get plenty of weeds and fertilizer to feed it at no cost to myself. This also seems to be the sort of slime that multiplies fast, so it shouldn't take too long. I also gave it some fertilizer made by the scavenger slimes, and it was pleased. Fluff slimes also like fertilizer, so maybe this applies to all

plant slimes. I'd like to keep experimenting with and observing these slimes going forward.

For both of these slimes, the first thing I'll need to do is get more of them. Speaking of which, there's another slime I'd like to have more of.

Bloody Slime

I'm currently observing these slimes. The effects of the poison seem to be gone, thankfully. I've ensured that they developed antibodies against bush snake poison. But they did also have resistance to poison and diseases to begin with. That being the case, I can assume that they have antibodies against other poisons and diseases as well. I'd like to research this in the future.

Getting more bloody slimes would help with that, but they need quite a bit of food before they multiply. Sieg's shop is currently my best source of bloody slime food. However, I already take everything I can get from him, so I'll have to find another source. One candidate I can think of is the Saionji Trading Company, where they also handle meat. To do something with that, though, I might need to leave some bloody slimes with someone at the laundromat in Lenaf and have them handle it.

As far as places that are close to me, the Adventurer's Guild has a place for dissecting monsters and animals. I heard during the training meetup that anyone can use it as long as they pay a fee. I've never used it before, so I don't know what they do with the unwanted parts. But maybe I can get some blood from there. Even if they just have bones and scraps of meat to offer, I could use that as food too. It won't hurt to ask.



I finished writing out my thoughts. I had already eaten dinner as well, so I didn't have much else to do before bed. I was curious about how my mushrooms were doing, though. When I checked yesterday, some thin ones were sprouting up. Before going to sleep, I headed to the passage where I kept the mushroom bed.

As soon as I opened the first door I'd installed yesterday, I heard a sound. It was like something small was scratching at the other side of the door, so I thought maybe a small rat had gotten in. I cast Investigate to be sure, and there did seem to be at least ten to twenty of something on the other side of the door. They weren't small rats, though. They were something smaller. I quickly called upon my sticky slimes to set up a sticky trap.



I checked to make sure the sticky trap was ready, lit up the room with light magic, and shut the door behind me. Prepared for anything, I threw the next door open. I was shocked to see some mushrooms running around. Two legs were attached to their stems. They fled from me, crashed into a wall, and fell over.

I guessed that these were running mushes. I didn't know they were monsters, but I did know them as materials for medicine. They were mushrooms that had been magicified by magical energy, and they served as extremely rare materials for magic medicine. The medicine was effective as a vitamin supplement and for improving physical constitution. Most notably, though, they could enhance the medicinal effects of other medicine. That could potentially make the medicine poisonous, though, so some caution was required.

They were even more scarce than ordinary mushrooms and they could run fast, so obtaining them was no easy task. They were primarily found in the Numel Wetlands, especially during the rainy season. Not only were they rare, but the regions where they were found would yield more mushrooms the following year, so they were said to bring good fortune to those who found them.

If they were supposed to be so rare, though, I didn't know why I was seeing several dozen of them. I thought these might be some other type of mushroom monster, so I cast Monster Appraisal.

Running Mush

Skills: Spore Production 6, Spore Spread 4, Rapid Movement 6

They turned out to be running mushes after all. Their skills also seemed to indicate why more mushrooms would be around the year after they appeared.

These had to have come from the mushroom bed I was using. Upon closer inspection, their legs and sharp-clawed feet were the only way in which they looked different from the mushrooms I was trying to cultivate. I was just trying to grow ordinary mushrooms, but they must have been transformed by magical energy. I didn't know where that magical energy came from, though. I did use water magic for the water, but that didn't seem like enough for magicification. Running mushes were supposed to be pretty rare as well, so I couldn't imagine that just a little energy was enough to transform them.

Then I thought maybe the scavenger slime fertilizer had something to do with it. It was possible that slime bodies were made of magical energy, so if some was contained in the fertilizer they made, that might have done it. If so, then I couldn't even grow normal

mushrooms this way. Not that it was much of a loss, all things considered, but it was kind of disappointing.

At any rate, I needed to catch the running mushes and do something about them. I could think about the rest later. They were medicinal ingredients, so I considered feeding them to a medicine slime. I also needed to make some medicine to deliver to Glissela, so that was another possibility. I thought about what to do after I caught the running mushes, chasing them into my traps like a sheepdog.



An hour passed after that. I messed something up, but maybe that was a good thing. A medicine slime on the floor of the medicine mixing room seemed delighted after eating running mushes. I gave it only one at first, but then I accidentally left out a basket of them as I started making a new mushroom bed. The medicine slime used its tentacles to snatch and eat one running mush after another, and next thing I knew, it had taken more than ten of them. I only wanted to feed it one to see what happened, but thankfully it didn't get sick. I used Monster Appraisal to see if anything changed.

Medicine Slime

Skills: Medicine Production 5, Poison Resistance 3, Disease Resistance 5, Physical Attack Resistance 1, Jump 3, Consume 3, Absorb 3, Split 3, Spear Mastery 1

The mushrooms had a clear effect. The medicine slime's Medicine Production skill had jumped two levels. I also checked what types of medicine it could produce.

- Nutrition Drink
- Vitamin Supplement
- Medicinal Effect Enhancer

Those three had been added to its existing list. It was now able to produce medicine with the same effects as the running mushes. I didn't know exactly how to make use of these, particularly the third one. By reacting to the magical energy within a drug, it could enhance the effects. Raising the effects of medicine too much could turn it into poison, though, so I would have to be careful with that. I didn't know how much it would enhance the effects. The existing recipes that running mushes were used in already had specified uses, but that didn't apply to the medicine slime's enhancing fluid. I had no way to be sure that it would be exactly the same as the running mushrooms either, so I had to experiment to make sure it was safe. In any case, it

didn't seem like these would be usable right away. I decided to write this all down for later.



When I used the medicine I made as an excuse to visit the Merchant's Guild the next day, Glissela was stunned.

"You're really something, you know," she said. "You never cease to amaze me. I'd understand if you brought me four or five running mushes, but more than thirty at once?" And that was just what I had left over after the medicine slime ate the rest.

"I'm glad you like them."

"I thought you were just cultivating mushrooms to eat on your own. So they happened to all grow into running mushes, and you're not sure how you should go about growing regular mushrooms, is that right?"

"Right. I think it'll be fine if I grow them without using magic, so I was wondering if you could tell me about fertilizer that doesn't contain any magical energy."

"I've never used any fertilizer intended for mushrooms. Mushroom cultivation is a bit of an odd hobby to get into, in my opinion. Why don't you just eat the running mushes, if that's what you want to do? It looks like they were originally edible mushrooms, so they should be pretty good."

"They're edible?! I just knew about their medicinal properties."

"I haven't tried them myself, mind you. And I think there are better uses for them anyway."

"True."

Running mushes could be used in a wide variety of medicines. That included cures for diseases often thought to be incurable, which could go for a hundred thousand sute even when bought locally. It could be even more expensive depending on the time and place, so I could make a fortune off that alone.

What I cared about was the flavor, though. If they happened to taste better than normal mushrooms, then I guess I'd have nothing to complain about. I didn't want the medicinal effects to do anything weird, though.

"I can give you some fertilizer that farmers would typically use. You'll have to find out if they work for mushrooms on your own. In exchange, I'll take one running mush and ask you to mix some medicine for me again. Then we'll be even."

"Thank you!"

"I'll make some money off that medicine, so don't worry about it."

We chatted as the ingredients for the medicine were being prepared, and Glissela mentioned something that caught my attention.

“Bandits? Around here?”

“I’ve heard a few times that some suspicious folks have been sighted coming to the area. But there only seem to be four or five of them at most. There was a group of bandits that got taken out in Gaunago, so maybe these are survivors from that. I don’t know if you’re interested in taking a job around here, but I’d be careful when walking outside the city if I were you. You probably look like a good target, whether you actually are or not.”

“Thank you for the information.”

I decided to check out the job at the Adventurer’s Guild.

Chapter 4 Episode 30: Search Request

When I entered the adventurer's guild, the receptionist suddenly called my name. "Ryoma! Perfect timing," she said.

"Hello, Maylene. Did something happen?"

"We were contacted by a guild near Lake Latoin. It was about mad salamanders." Mad salamanders happened to be one of the monsters I wanted to fight. "They said that mad salamanders come to Lake Latoin every year to get food before they hibernate in the winter. They cause trouble for fishermen in the area. For the small fishing villages in particular, dealing with them can be a matter of life or death."

Lake Latoin was near the home of the people who gave me the bloody slime, if I recalled correctly. "Does that include a village called Sikum?"

"Mad salamanders show up all around Lake Latoin, so Sikum is no exception. A lot of these places need protection, so they're looking for adventurers who can help exterminate those monsters. They'll put out all sorts of postings, from hunting down mad salamanders to just odd jobs, so why not give the place a visit?"

"I'd love to, but what's the time frame for these jobs?"

"The most damage is supposed to happen around two months from now, so I think you can go around then. Is there something else you need to do?"

"Two months should be fine. I just have some business to take care of next month, so I'd be happy to go to Lake Latoin after that."

"Good to hear. Did you want to take a job today?"

"The guildmaster of the merchant's guild told me that some suspicious characters, presumed to be survivors from a vanquished band of bandits, might be coming to Gimul. Do you have any information or requests related to that?"

"Oh yeah, you got permission to take those jobs, didn't you? One second." Maylene took a bundle of parchment out from under the counter. "We have two new pieces of information related to bandits. The guildmaster already told you one, but the other concerns a pack of bandits suspected to be related to what he said. But those bandits were exterminated near Gaunago, so there are no further jobs to take regarding them. It's not like those suspicious characters are confirmed to be bandits either, and their location is unclear."

It sounded like there were still some unanswered questions. With that in mind, I figured it might be wiser to make more medicine instead for today.

“Excuse me?” someone said meekly. It was Paena, the talented new hire at the guild.

“I’m sorry, Ryoma, can you give us a moment?” Maylene asked.

“Sorry to interrupt!”

“Oh, it’s fine,” I said.

“Look, he says it’s fine,” said Maylene. “What is it?”

“Someone’s here to put out a request,” said Paena.

They started whispering to each other, so I turned away and looked around the mostly empty guild. Most of the people there seemed to be on their break. They were either staring at the bulletin board or chatting with nearby adventurers. Suddenly, a bearded man near the edge of the counter walked up to me. Judging from his height, I guessed he was a dwarf.

“Sorry, boy, but could you get out of the way? Hey, lady!” he shouted at Paena from across the counter.

“Yes?! Wait, stop! We’ll get to you, so go back and wait your turn.”

“Sorry, but I’ve got no time to waste. I need someone to find Pedro as soon as possible.”

It sounded like someone had gotten lost. Maylene looked at the bowing man with a conflicted look on her face, then stepped forward. “Mr. Guts, I believe? I’m sorry, but this isn’t enough money to make a request here.”

“I know I’m making an unreasonable request, but this is all I can pay right now. If Pedro is found, though, then he should have goods on his person. We can sell that off for some extra money. And either way, I’m able to get enough money for you. I just need time.” The dwarf was pretty panicked. He even drew the attention of the few other people in the guild. “He shouldn’t be that far away. Aren’t there any adventurers who can go look for him?”



“Paena,” I said.

“Yes? What is it?”

“Could you tell me about him?”

Now I was kind of curious, and both Paena and I were now left out of the conversation, so I turned to her for answers. She thought about it for a moment, looked at the two of them, then looked at me. “Well, we haven’t decided to take his request yet, so this is more of a personal than a business issue. But you might be the right person to help.”

I felt kind of bad for bothering them about it but listened in until I got some answers.

“I’m sorry, but can you go over everything from the beginning again?” Maylene asked the dwarf.

“Yeah, so I’m Guts. I run a small smithing business in the western district. I sent some weapons I made to Keleban the other day, but this morning I received a letter saying that they didn’t get my delivery. It was supposed to be delivered by a man named Pedro, and I’d like you to find him.”

“Can you be more specific about the date?”

“Three days ago. He was already supposed to have gotten to Keleban by then, and he should’ve been on his way home yesterday.”

“But the goods were never delivered?”

“Right. The guy who ordered the weapons got in contact with me right away.”

“Do you think there’s any particular reason the delivery is running late?”

“I’ve asked Pedro to do this job several times. He knows the route, and the weather’s been fine. He should’ve gotten there on time unless something terrible happened.”

“That’s fair.” It seemed like Maylene had some idea as to what had happened.

“Takebayashi, come over here,” Paena said, no longer as hesitant as she was before. I followed her to the other end of the counter, where she laid out a map and ran her slender finger over it. “So Gimul is here, and Keleban is here. And the road that the missing person was using is here.”

“Looks like it heads in the same direction as the road I took for the training meetup.”

“It’s close, yes. This road turns left near the foot of the mountain, though.”

I knew the route well enough; it was a mountain road that ran from the southern gate. The road I took stayed at a low elevation the whole time, but this road seemed to go through the mountain range.

“This road passes through two towns,” Paena continued. “This one here is a lodging town. The road was made wide to make it easy for travelers and carriages to traverse, so you can travel by foot, horse, or anything else. A lot of people use this road, and not many monsters show up there either, so it’s relatively safe. There’s little chance of danger on this road, unless something is out of the ordinary.”

“But the possibility of danger is there, right?”

“Yes, it’s a non-zero possibility. But like I said, a lot of people use this road, so if something did happen, I think somebody would have seen it. If there was an accident or some sudden monster appearances, there should at least have been the remains of a carriage for people to find.”

“I see.” All the same, though Pedro was missing, and he’d last been seen three days ago. When it came to jobs like these, it was important to act fast. “Paena, is there any issue with this request?”

“Well, it’s not cheap to request a search for a missing person. There’s no telling how long it’ll take for them to be found, if they even can be found at all. So to make them easier to find, the efficient thing to do is hire a whole group to participate in the search.”

“And paying all those people drives up the cost, I’m guessing.”

“Yes. Plus, this search would take place in the mountains, so we would need around twenty people minimum, or ideally, double that. Those people would have to be paid every day for the duration of the search, so it’s an enormous expense for the client.”

If someone got into an accident while mountain climbing in Japan, hiring a private rescue team to find them would cost at least one million yen per day. On Earth, it was so costly that mountain climbing insurance to cover those expenses was a thing. This world seemed to be much the same in that regard.

“Let’s say we hire the number of people needed with the money he’s offering,” Paena said. “Regardless of whether they find anything or not, we’d have to pay them all ninety-seven sute per day. If they can find the carriage or coachman, or safely secure the lost delivery, they’ll be paid a reward of three thousand sute. I don’t think we’d be able to pay them for more than two days of work. Search missions in the mountains can also be significantly more dangerous depending on the weather, and I just don’t think we can pay as much as the work warrants. The guild staff is supposed to ensure the income of our adventurers as part of our job, so when we can’t pay the appropriate amount, we can’t accept requests. If it were just up to me, I’d like to find some way to help him, though.” That was one of the pitfalls of being a hired worker.

“It was just so sudden that I don’t have the money on hand right now,” Guts said to Maylene. “But I can still save up enough if you give

me some time.”

“If you want to pay later, you’ll either need to guarantee that you will somehow, or pass an inspection,” Maylene replied. Their conversation wasn’t getting anywhere.

“Paena, I don’t know about anyone else, but I think I’d be fine with what he can pay.”

Thankfully, I’d finished up all the important business I had yesterday, so I had nothing urgent to attend to. The destination would be easy enough for me to get to with space magic. I also had limour birds, so I could search for Pedro from the sky. Assuming something did happen to him, it would be best to act now. And personally, I was curious to know what happened as well.

“I’ll talk to Maylene about it again,” Paena said. “Maylene!” She walked over to Maylene, then came back less than a minute later, bringing Guts and Maylene with her.

“Lad, will you really go looking for me?” Guts asked.

“My name is Ryoma Takebayashi. I know I’m young, but I actually happen to be a D Rank adventurer, so if you let me, I may be able to help. I’ll do everything I can, but I can’t guarantee anything.”

“I know. Your offer to help is appreciated all the same.”

“Ryoma,” Maylene said and beckoned me over. When I got close, she whispered into my ear. “I just want to be sure of something. You probably won’t want to hear this, but when it comes to requests like these, your efforts most likely aren’t going to be rewarded. Some people who take search missions end up regretting it. We still don’t actually know what happened. Do you understand?”

I saw her point, but it didn’t change my mind. “Thank you for your concern, but I’ll be fine. Besides, in the event that nothing happened, it’ll give me a funny story to tell.”

“Well, if you say so. I’ll accept the request and appoint you as the sole adventurer on it. Let’s say that your job is to travel down that route to Keleban and see if you can find this person. What you typically want to do is search near the roads, then act on whatever you happen to find. How you do that is up to you.”

“Thank you.” If I could take the job on my own, then all the decisions could be up to me.

“Make sure to prepare as much as you can. And don’t do anything crazy, okay? Now show me your guild card, please,” Maylene said. She had already started to make the documents. In the meantime, I asked Guts to describe the missing person. “Done. Mr. Guts, just review the request and sign here, please.”

“Looks good to me! Thanks, I’m counting on you.”

“Understood, I’ll do my best,” I said. Thus, I agreed to search for the missing person.



Two hours later, after I got my card back and left the guild, I got ready at the laundromat and then left town. Thanks to how far I could travel with space magic, I made it to the border between the plains and the mountain road while it was still bright out. Ahead of me was a road surrounded by trees and thickets. It was wide enough for three carriages and well-paved. I walked along and searched for Pedro.

I opened my Dimension Home and released my limour birds. The road was bright under the sunlight, but there were places to the left and right that I couldn't see due to the foliage. Thankfully my birds could search from above. I asked them to fly in a figure-eight formation, and call out to me if they saw anything in the forest. The six limour birds spread their blue wings and took flight. The glow from the sunlight gave them a more beautiful color than usual. Under different circumstances, I would have liked to just sit back and watch them. Too often I got to see beautiful sights at the worst times.

Chapter 4 Episode 31: Lodging Town

“A carriage that got into an accident, you say? I didn’t see anything. How about you?”

“Me neither.”

“Guess we can’t be much help, then. Sorry.”

“Oh, but would you like to ride with us? We’re not too far from town, and it’ll get dark soon.”

“Thanks for offering, but I’d like to search a little more on my way there. I appreciate your cooperation.”

“Yeah? Good luck with that, then.”

“Be careful!”

“You too!”

After chatting with a nice old couple, I watched their carriage disappear into the distance. I had sprinted most of the way from Gimul to the lodging town. My limour birds tried their best, but there was a lot obstructing their sight; we still hadn’t found a single clue.

This mountain stood at an elevation of about one thousand meters. It had a road that could be easily traversed without getting altitude sickness. If I were to stray from that path, though, I would be on a steep slope, surrounded by the shadows cast by the countless trees and their many branches. Thanks to the convenient road, I doubt that many people strayed into that territory. I could have missed something somewhere, or maybe I still had a ways to go. There was no telling if Pedro had wandered off the road at some point, and if he had, then I didn’t know if he went left or right.

I just wanted to find some sort of clue. If I could narrow down the location to some extent, I could mobilize all my slimes to find him. They weren’t the most mobile creatures, but by harnessing the power of over six thousand slimes, I could search thoroughly in all directions.

I kept walking around near the road in search of clues, checking between the trees where it was especially hard to see anything. Eventually I arrived at the lodging town. The town was surrounded by a simple wall made of many logs, probably built from nearby trees.

“You there!” a guard at the entrance said sternly. “Are you a traveler? You were acting kind of suspicious. What are you doing at this time of night?”

“I’m an adventurer from Gimul, and I’m searching for a missing person. Here’s my guild card, and here’s the job sheet.” I slowly

approached the guard and presented my identification.

“Well, looks like you’re not lying,” the guard said and calmed down. “Sorry I thought you were suspicious. You’re free to pass.”

“I’m glad to see you’re doing your job. By the way, if you don’t mind me asking, has anyone gone missing around here lately? Or have you seen a broken carriage or anything? If you have, that’d help me out.”

“I haven’t heard anything along those lines. After I read that job description, I’d like to know myself.”

“I see... darn.”

“Will you be staying at an inn here tonight?”

“That’s the plan.”

I still had some energy, and I was good at burning the midnight oil when the situation called for it, but it would be more difficult and less efficient than searching during the day. Furthermore, I wasn’t accustomed to this sort of terrain. I could spend all day searching the Forest of Gana with no trouble, but I was unfamiliar with this mountain. I had my limour birds to fall back on, so the chances of getting into an accident were slim, but if there was any risk, then searching for Pedro at night without any clues probably wasn’t worth it. Instead, I could use tonight to ask for information around town.

“I’d recommend that too,” the guard said. “We do maintenance on the roads around here, but if you stray from the path, there are a lot of steep slopes.”

“I see. Do you have any good inns to suggest?”

“Go straight down the main road until you see the sign for Telecy’s Cafeteria. The inn across from them has clean rooms for a good price.”

“Thank you.”

I returned my limour birds to my Dimension Home and headed straight to the inn he told me about. This lodging town was, of course, even smaller than Gimul. But there were lights in the windows of the wooden buildings that served as inns and dining places along the main road, so the place looked no less lively. I reached the inn very quickly, so it was pretty close.

“Good evening. The gate guard told me about this place. Are there any rooms available?”

“Yes. If you’re just staying overnight, it’ll be fifty sute. If you’d like a meal with that, it’s seventy sute,” the receptionist said.

“I’ll take a room and a meal, please.”

“Thank you!”

I handed over the money and got a small wooden board in return. “When you want food, take this to the cafeteria across the street.” It was evidently a meal ticket.

“So I’ll get food if I give this to them?”

“You’ll get bread, soup, and the salad of the day. Anything else will cost extra.”

I went to my room, and it was as clean as I was led to believe. It looked like it was cleaned regularly, and I found no stains. But a bed and a small table were the only pieces of furniture in the room, and they took up 70% of the space. There were no decorations either. Well, this *was* a lodging town, and this inn was more for commoners, so I couldn’t expect much more. If guests were just traveling for work, they probably didn’t stay for long anyway. It kind of reminded me of a capsule hotel; it served its purpose, so I didn’t have any objections. But there was nothing much to see there, so I just cleaned myself up and went to the cafeteria.



“Welcome! Um, are you alone, kid?” a cheerful girl at the cafeteria asked.

“Good evening. I’m staying at the inn across from here. Here’s my meal ticket.”

“Thanks! This way, please!”

The girl led me to my seat. The cafeteria was full of tables tightly packed together. People sat around them enjoying food and drinks, constantly laughing. It was a large building with two floors, but every inch of it brimmed with human warmth. It was like the beer garden Serge once took me to, except cozier. There wasn’t as much excitement, but it felt more like spending quality time with a family.

“Sorry about the wait!” the girl said as she brought my food out, but I hadn’t been waiting long at all. Personally, I was pretty pleased.

I started with a mouthful of a soup, whose thickness reminded me of a stew. The first thing I felt was its warmth. It passed from the top of my tongue down into my throat and warmed me to the core. Maybe I was colder than I thought. The vegetables were tender and gave the broth a soft, natural sweetness complemented by many herbs. It covered up the aroma of the finely sliced meat, which had a wild, savory flavor. It was nothing short of delectable.

The bread was black and hard, but tearing off a piece and dipping it in the soup softened it up. The soup added to the taste of the wheat, and it was more filling than the soup on its own. The salad was made up of boiled leafy greens, red beans, and dressing. The beans were sweet and went well with the tartness of the lamon. I was easily motivated to eat every bit of the meal. It warmed my body and soul, and I felt re-energized.

“Excuse me,” I said to the girl.

“Yes? Wow, you finished already?”

“Yes, it was delicious.” As I had her clear my dishes away, I decided to ask her some questions. “I’m looking for a man named Pedro. Do you know anything about him?”

“What’s he like?”

From what Guts said, he was about 170 centimeters tall, with brown hair all over his head and face. He was a bear beastkin, and his most defining trait was his green nose. I told all of this to the girl.

“Oh, that guy!”

“You know him?”

“I’ve seen him before, if that helps.”

“Do you remember the last time he came here?”

“Not sure, but I know I’ve seen him a lot.” She thought about it, so I silently waited. “Oh!”

“Did you remember something?!”

“No, sorry, I don’t know.”

“Oh.”

“But I do know that there are some people he’d come to the cafeteria with a lot. Maybe they’d know something.”

“Do you know where I could find them?”

“Yeah, their base is in this town, so you can probably meet them there. Head way down the road in front of the cafeteria, then...”

It sounded like I’d found a good lead.



I went off the information I received at the cafeteria by chance and searched for Pedro’s acquaintances. I found myself on a road with more carriages than pedestrians. The buildings in the area were larger than elsewhere, and everyone there seemed to either be loading or unloading goods from carriages or guarding the people doing that. This appeared to be a warehouse district.

In the corner of the warehouse district, there was a sign depicting a gigantic sitting dog, almost a wolf, with sharp eyes. It was Wild Dog, the delivery service I was looking for.

“Excuse me!”

“Hm? What do you want, kid?”

“You need something delivered at this time of night?”

I introduced myself to the two guards outside the building and asked them if they knew anything.

“Looking for someone? Well, Assimo does work here.”

“Not here right now, though. He’s probably off drinking at a bar or something.”

“Do you know which one?” I asked.

“No idea. Wait, actually, someone was treating everyone to drinks today, right?”

“Oh yeah, saw something about that on the bulletin board! Hold on a second, I’ll check.”

“Thank you!”

One of the men went inside the building.

“Hardly ever hear about anyone going missing around here, though,” the other man said.

“Is that so?”

“Occasionally we hear something like that from a carriage that’s passing through, but it usually just turns out that someone got in a little accident. A lot of food passes through here between Gimul and Keleban, so there’s a lot of traveling by carriage going on. If anything strange happened, we’d know right away. You sure this Pedro guy didn’t take a different route?”

I couldn’t deny the possibility, but based on my current information, all I knew was that he normally took this route. That was the only lead I had to go on.

“Sounds like you’ve got it rough, kid. Well, good luck.”

“Hey, I know where he’s at!” the other guard said as he returned. Once he gave me the information, I left the warehouse district.

Chapter 4 Episode 32: A Bar Where I Don't Fit In

"Is this the place?"

The bar was at the end of a narrow alley that branched off of the main street. While the street I came from had many flashy stores and restaurants, this place was rather plain. The building seemed old and gave off a desolate vibe, but I could hear men constantly laughing inside, so it was evidently quite popular.

The entrance had swinging doors, the likes of which you'd see from a saloon in a Western movie. While they were made for someone to push through on their way in, I could just walk right under them. I guess that was thanks to my childish body, but the swinging doors seemed to be positioned strangely high up. The bar looked bigger than expected on the inside, with quite a bit of space extending far back. The seating was kind of cramped together, but there were well over thirty seats.

"Agh, what? Hic. What's a kid doing here?"

"Came to get someone?"

"Hey! Looks like somebody's wife's in a bad mood."

I didn't think about it when I was going in, but considering how young I looked, I stuck out like a sore thumb. A few drunks looked at me and grumbled. Some looked simply curious, some looked amused, and some looked disgruntled, but the range of looks I got varied wildly. I smelled alcohol, of course, but there was also a horrid stench that I could only assume came from cigarettes. I wanted to ask the questions I needed to and get out of there quickly, but there were so many people around that I didn't know who I was looking for. Judging by the location of the bar and the atmosphere inside, it was likely only frequented by regulars who lived in the area, so I figured I could just ask the bartender.

"This is a bar, kid," the bartender said. "Ain't nothin' here for ya to drink." He didn't say it outright, but clearly he wanted me to leave. I wasn't there to drink anyway, so it didn't matter much, but I showed him my status board all the same. "Oh, you've got the God of Wine's blessing, eh?"

"I'm looking for someone. Is there someone named Assimo here?" I asked. The bartender gestured toward a corner of the bar. "Thank you."

I left a medium bronze coin for the bartender and headed to the tables. Eight men sat around it, in two booths of four apiece. They were probably all delivery men. Their ages and races varied, but they were all pretty stacked.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but I heard that Assimo was here," I said.

"Whaddaya need?" the person in the seat closest to me asked and turned around. He was a human in his early twenties. I don't know if it was because he was pretty drunk, but he was in a good mood, much to my convenience. I introduced myself and explained the situation.

"So ya want to know about Pedro, do ya?"

"Yes, I just need to know when you last saw him."

"Yeah, sure, I could tell you. But y'know, there's a right way an' a wrong way t'go about askin' for a favor," he said and glanced at his empty mug.

"How about ale, then?"

"Oh, thank—"

"Moron."

"Yeowch!" Assimo yelped. The man sitting to his side punched him, turning his jovial voice into one of agony. "What was that about, Boss?"

"Quit solicitin' a little kid for drinks. You already drink like a damn fish," the other man said.

"Sorry. Hey, kid, I last saw Pedro two days ago."

"In this town?"

"Yeah, the other day, early in the morning. I was getting breakfast and we happened to go to the same restaurant. We had a chat and all, so it was definitely him."

"Do you know what happened after that?"

"He was the first in the restaurant, and he was the first to leave. Don't know where he went. Said something about heading off to Keleban as usual, though."

"Then he must have taken this road. Do you know any reasons why he wouldn't have reached Keleban by today?"

"Can't say I do, kid."

Another one of the men spoke up. He looked like he could be fifty or older. "I know Pedro myself, and he's been using this road since he was a kid, when his old man was in the business. He should know all the dangerous spots, and how to handle a horse. Assimo, you said you saw him early in the morning?"

"Yep, after sunrise."

"So that excludes him getting into an accident in the darkness, then. Did anyone come back from Keleban today?"

"I did," another of the men said.

"See anyone stuck anywhere on the road?"

"I saw a few people resting, but not Pedro. I know him too, and if I saw him, I'd remember."

"I just got back from there too, and I didn't see him."

"If he's been seen in this town, but not since then, I think there's a good chance that something happened to him," I said.

"What are the chances that something happened and he went back to Gimul?"

"His client says he went to visit his home, but he wasn't there."

"So he didn't go back to town, then?"

"What if he did go back to town, but stayed at an inn instead?"

"The hell'd he do that for, ya dumbass? He'd be wastin' his money."

"Well, hell, I'm too drunk to think."

"Hey, Assimo, anything else you know? You ate with him, so he must've mentioned something else."

"Mostly he just bragged about his love life. He said he wanted to propose to his squeeze when he got back to town or something. Like I'm gonna listen to that crap anyway! Oh, but he did mention he was saving up money for clothes and a ring, I think."

"You think he got involved in some sketchy job and they made him disappear?"

"You're overthinking it. Maybe he tried to deliver too big a load and got in an accident or something."

Those were both plausible explanations. Either way, I felt like there was something to find on the mountainous road to Keleban. Those who took the road today said they didn't see anything so I would need to search the forest by the side of the road.

"Quit yammering already!" someone shouted from behind us. Everyone turned to look at a red-faced man glaring at us from the counter. "You! Kid!" The man slumped out of his seat and stomped toward me between the narrow space between the tables. "When'd this place turn into a playground, huh?"

"I'm sorry, I'm looking for someone who—"

"Why should I care?!" He had a point, I guess. "I don't come here to see kids, I hate kids! Now get out before I force you out!"

"I'll leave as soon as I'm done asking questions," I said and moderately bowed my head, but that probably wasn't what he wanted to hear. He clicked his tongue and clenched his fist. Whether in this world or on Earth, drunkards just don't listen to reason.

"You little—" the man said and swung his fist down at me, but I caught it in one hand. He yelped, apparently not expecting that. He looked at his fist and tried to yank his arm away, but I expected him to try and punch me again if he did, so I didn't let go. I was the one who didn't belong there, admittedly, so I was planning to leave as

soon as my business was done, but I didn't want to get punched.

The man firmly planted his feet on the ground and tried desperately to tug his arm from me, while I tugged back. There was a nearby pillar that I could use to push back on with my legs too, so in a game of tug of war, I wasn't going to lose. If he happened to pull me up, I would've been left dangling, though.

When I had to deal with angry drunks on Earth, just tolerating them and taking the beating was the least messy option. But in this world, I didn't need to let that happen. It made matters a lot easier. Now that I thought about it, though, I didn't know any other good ways to end the conflict, so I wasn't sure what to do next. The people who were going to help a moment ago seemed to think I didn't need assistance, so they went back to their seats to watch from there. And this drunk wasn't giving up.

"Nwooooooooooooooh!" the drunk roared. "Little shit! Let go of me! I'll kill your ass!"

Then I remembered there was something I could use from my match the other day.

"Buddy, don't you think you've had a bit too much?" I said. The man shuddered, and I felt the energy rapidly drain from his fist. "Just take a chill pill, okay?" I let go of his fist and showed that I wasn't going to fight. But then the man freaked out and ran off, ramming his way through other customers to take the shortest path to the exit.

Maybe I overdid it a bit. I figured that if I put myself in the same mood as during that match during the training meetup where I scared everyone, it'd get him to stop, but this wasn't exactly what I intended. The customers behind the man all looked away from me or laid their heads on the table to avert their eyes. A beastkin man's tail curled up. Nobody wanted to make eye contact with me. Also, I don't think that man paid his bill before he left. At any rate, now I stood out even more.

I went to the counter and said, "Sorry about that. Is this enough to cover his bill?" I set three silver coins in front of the surly bartender.

"Too much," he said.

"Use what's left over to buy drinks for the other customers, it's on me. Especially the people who just spilled their drinks, and the people I was talking to."

"Oh?! What's that, kid?! You're buying drinks for everyone?!" a customer shouted before the bartender could respond.

"Yes, I'm sorry that I got in the way of your fun."

"Hell yeah!"

"Free drinks!"

"I'll take it!"

It only took a moment for the bar to regain its previous liveliness.

Faster than I would have expected, but I was happy about it. Then I went back to the delivery people's table to thank them and say I was leaving.

"Sorry about all that," I said.

"Hey, it's a bar. Fights happen all the time."

"Yeah, what he said. You're pretty good, kid."

"I am an adventurer, after all."

"But, well, probably a good idea for you to leave soon."

"Thanks for the drinks!"

"Thank you for answering my questions."

I left the bar. A lot had happened, but now I knew that Pedro was in this town, so I gained something. That alone was a step forward. Coming here was worth it.

And while it was the drunk who started a fight with me, I kind of felt bad about what I did. I wasn't expecting it to be so effective, considering Beck and friends just thought I was a little scary. Maybe the drunk was more timid than his size would indicate. I checked my status board for answers, and there was a new skill I hadn't seen before— *Intimidate* (3). I wondered why this new skill was Level 3 already.

Chapter 4 Episode 33: The Work of the Limour Birds

I pondered this new skill as I returned to the inn, and the man at the reception desk welcomed me back. It was dark at the entrance, so I thought nobody was there, but this was convenient for me.

“Excuse me, is there anywhere around here where I could let my familiars out without bothering anyone?” I asked. “I have some bird familiars.”

It seemed unquestionable that Pedro had taken this road, so I wanted to check the forest again. I explained the circumstances to the man.

“You can use the roof,” he said. “Nobody would be up there around this time. Oh, but if there’s any laundry there, then watch out for that.”

“Thank you, I appreciate it.”

“The safety of the roads is important to all of us.”

With his permission, I headed straight for the roof. I climbed the wooden stairs he directed me to and opened the door at the top. Under the starry sky, ropes for hanging clothes on glowed in the moonlight. There was nothing else on the roof aside from a railing along the edge, so my birds could fly in any direction from here.

When I opened my Dimension Home, my limour birds loudly cawed and flew out. I told them to hush so they wouldn’t awaken others at the inn, and they listened.

“Now, I’d like to ask for your help again. Observe the whole mountain from up above this town,” I said.

The six limour birds flew into the cloudless sky in a V formation. They were led by the highest-ranking of them, Eins, the nightmare limour bird. When they would hunt for prey, he always took the lead unless I gave orders otherwise. Eins was brazen enough to perch on my head instead of trees sometimes. He was the leader of the six.

Next were Zwei and Drei. These two seemed to enjoy delivering letters, so I usually gave that job to one of them. But they had big appetites, so they always demanded a lot of food when they got back. I thanked and rewarded them by answering their demands, but I felt like they had grown somewhat since I first made contracts with them. From what I heard, they were rewarded with food by the people to whom they delivered letters as well. I didn’t know if they were just

growing or if they were getting fat, but I needed to keep an eye on these two.

Behind them were Vier and Funf. These were the only females in the group, and they seemed to be close with Zwei and Drei respectively. They left a big flock to be with me, but maybe they would grow their family in the near future.

Then, there was Sechs, who was in the back of the group. He was the smallest of the limour birds, but when he flew on his own, he seemed to be the fastest. He must have stayed in the back to make sure he stayed at the same pace as the rest of the group. Sechs just seemed to like flying, and sometimes he would fly around the mine like a speeding bullet. Maybe he was a speed demon. As with my metal slimes, I wanted to make sure he didn't get in any accidents.

At Eins's quiet call, the six of them cleanly flew off in different directions. I shared my vision with Eins, and it appeared to work fine. I could see through his eyes as he looked down upon the mountain from high in the sky. The lights in the lodging town shined like stars in the darkness. Eins was pretty high up.

Curious about the other birds, I switched to their eyes, but what I saw was much the same with all of them. It was night, so I mostly just saw darkness. It was only possible to share vision with a familiar when they were within a certain distance, but outside that distance, not even the darkness should have been visible. Presumably that meant that they were close enough.

The furthest one from me was currently Sechs, and when I looked through his eyes, I could already see the foot of the mountain. He darted through the sky with nothing blocking his way. I didn't mind that he was having fun, but hoped he wasn't forgetting to actually search for clues.

I told him to remember the mission, then suddenly noticed something. Even if he traveled in a straight line, the foot of the mountain should have been more than a couple hundred meters away. Maybe he could just see far in the distance from his altitude, but it didn't seem like we should have been able to share vision so easily. Maybe my taming magic was rapidly improving, but if it was, I had no idea when that happened or why. The only new thing I had done related to taming magic lately was taking the aptitude exam, but that didn't seem like enough for such a change.

Funf found something, so I decided to put that thought on the back burner for now. I switched to her field of vision, but I couldn't quite make out what she was looking at. I could make out the branches and needles of a conifer tree somewhat through the darkness, but little else. Something appeared to be moving, so maybe it was an animal or human. There was some sound as well. I couldn't

see whatever it was, though, so I had no way to know if it was a person.

But this was the first report I received here. On top of that, Funf had flown over the side of the road to Keleban. I wanted to have all my limour birds search that area, so I called them back. Funf turned right around. I switched to the eyes of the others to check if they got the orders. Eins did. So did Zwei. Drei did too, and Vier wasn't far from him. Sechs had gotten pretty far away and would likely arrive last, but he was on his way back.

Having to keep switching between all their eyes was rather bothersome. I wondered if there was a way to see through all their eyes at once. The contracts let us share our senses, so they could always signal if something special happened, but I wanted to be able to readily see everything they saw at once if possible. I saw the sharing of vision as something akin to looking at CCTV footage on a screen. That being the case, I tried to imagine a split-screen on top of that. It reminded me of a part-time job I'd once had as a security guard.

It actually seemed to be working. On one side, I saw what Sechs saw, and on the other, I saw that Eins was already above town. The two images didn't overlap, but I saw them both in my mind. There seemed to be a bit of static, but it was good enough. I tried harder to envision a security room receiving images from multiple cameras, and that made the images clearer. I'd need more practice to view three or more images at once, but I felt like I could at least handle two. My taming magic seemed to be improving after all. I didn't remember doing anything to practice with it, so that was odd, but I figured I could ask Taylor or the Jamil family about it some other time.

While I was testing this out, the limour birds assembled around me. When I asked them to head off and search again, Funf led the way this time, racing back to where she'd found something. After they got there, they split into two groups of three and resumed their search. I asked them to be wary of monsters, and told them it was fine to leave if it seemed too dangerous. They responded affirmatively, then lowered their altitude.

The two fields of vision I saw gave me a close look at the trees. The starry sky was hardly visible, so the image was even darker than it was up above. I could just barely make out the outlines of the trees, but I questioned how possible it was to search like this. The birds couldn't fly that fast here either, but it didn't seem to be an issue. They were migratory birds, so they were accustomed to flying at night. I asked them to keep up the search.

They split up to search two different locations, and I observed them through their eyes. When the limour birds really got moving,

though, my eyes couldn't keep up. The darkness was bad enough on its own, but they just moved too fast. The limour birds could apparently see, though; maybe it was thanks to night vision or something. Bird eyes and human eyes were structured differently, so the fact that I could even get an image I could make sense of was pretty convenient, I guess. It seemed plausible to me that they were seeing with night vision and I wasn't, but maybe I just needed more experience. Just watching them while they did all the work made me feel kind of down.

I got a report from Drei, Funf, and Sechs; They'd found something. I still didn't see any changes in Sechs's field of vision, though. I had them halt for the time being, then ordered Eins, Zwei, and Vier to converge with them. I watched the two fields of vision rise into the sky and prayed for any clues about Pedro as the six birds safely united, then got searching again. They swooped back down even faster than before and zipped between the trees. They seemed to hear a sound, and all of them were confident that something was there, so I had them come to a stop.

There was a light flickering between the trees, probably from a bonfire. Somebody was there. I had the birds watch carefully and got a gradually closer image of the light. Eventually, I saw a few humanoid shadows. Five people surrounded the bonfire. They were quite exhausted-looking men, all sitting on wooden boxes.

Chapter 4 Episode 34: The Work of the Familiars

These people were probably bandits. I couldn't be too sure from their appearance alone, but I had seen bandits in the Forest of Gana a fair number of times. From what I could see through the eyes of the limour birds, they all had long hair and beards. It didn't look like they had bathed in days, either. This wasn't the sort of place where the average citizen would go, and even if they were lumberjacks or some laborer of that nature, they would presumably keep up their appearances a little better. These people were definitely suspicious.

I saw five men, all of whom seemed like underlings. It looked like they didn't even have enough armor for three people between them. Someone who's played a lot of RPGs might think that equipment is just lying around anywhere, but mountain bandits often didn't have access to enough equipment. Their leaders got all the good equipment, while the rest only got the leftovers.

These people looked like typical underlings in an ill-equipped band of bandits, but they did all have swords that looked brand new. This was clearly strange. Nothing about these men made them look skilled enough to be worth giving good weapons. They were all covered in wounds and seemed easily distracted. They paid little attention to their surroundings and didn't even notice the limour birds watching them. They weren't speaking to each other either, and they seemed puzzled about something. Compared to the rest of their meager equipment, the brand new swords were out of place. And Pedro's delivery contained swords forged by my client.

Maybe it was too late to help him now. There was a pretty high chance that these men knew something, but at the same time, I could imagine the worst possible outcome already. In any case, I wanted information. And for that, I would need to capture these men alive.

I prepared for battle. And on the off chance that these weren't bandits after all, I prepared to apologize and pay them compensation too. Once I was ready, I canceled my stay at the inn.



Using my slimes and my special rope, I relied on my stamina to charge straight through the forest for about an hour. It took some time

because there was no road, but I had gotten close to where my limour birds were keeping watch. I took a break as I decided to look through their eyes again, and the bandits seemed to be asleep aside from two who were standing guard. They still had no idea about me or the limour birds. The trees were too tightly packed together for me to use a bow, though, so I couldn't use the paralyzing arrows I normally would. There was no great place for me to stand either. I would have to depend on my familiars this time.



“Caw! Caw, caw!”

“Wha?! Aaaaaaah!”

“My head, my head!”

“Knock it off! Get lost!”

I used it so seldom that I had almost forgotten, but Eins, the nightmare limour bird, could use a dark magic spell with a large effective radius that attacked the minds of its targets. He caused a lot of chaos that way before I formed a contract with him, so I trusted him to help suppress these bandits. Not only did he help, but he knocked them all out.

Next, I had my katana and scabbard split up into nine iron slimes and nine metal slimes. They split into groups of three and wrapped around the men's limbs and necks, serving as metal bindings. Once I confirmed that the men were completely restricted, I used the slimes' appetites as a metal detector of sorts and disarmed the men, then set their equipment against a random tree.

Three of the men regained consciousness. “What?! What's going on here?! Hey! A kid?” one said. They didn't know what was happening at first, but when they noticed they had been restrained, they were quick to figure it out.

“Hey! Did you do this?! Lemme go!”

“You know we're from the Poison Spider Gang, don't you?!”

“Poison Spider Gang?” I asked. “Aren't you the bandits who got exterminated recently?”

The men didn't answer, and they seemed to regret saying anything. It looked like I was right, thankfully. Now I wouldn't have to apologize.

“And you over there, I know you're awake.”

The other man uncomfortably laughed. Of the five men, the two furthest to the right shouted at me. The man furthest to the left was awakened by their shouts, but pretended to be asleep the entire time, although not very convincingly. He didn't yell at me or try to run, he just awkwardly laughed.

“Hey! Say something!” one of the others complained.

“You were gonna try and escape by yourself, weren’t you?!”

Now the group was starting to fall apart. They woke up yet another of the men, who joined the argument. I wasn’t getting anywhere with them and they were wasting my time. I cast Earth Fence on the three who were arguing, creating a wide fence made of stone around them. This spell was created for offensive purposes and the stakes had sharp tips that the trapped men couldn’t help but stare at.

“Save the arguments for later,” I said. “I have some questions for you. Who’s your leader?”

“Me!” three of them said.

“Who?”

“Me, I said!”

“Like hell you are! Who’d work for you?!”

“Hmph! You people, leaders? Don’t make me laugh.”

“My good man, you oughta know that our boss was exterminated,” the man furthest to the left said with an uncomfortable laugh. It sounded like he was trying to curry favor with me, and his voice was sickening. But he seemed like the easiest to talk to.

“I have some questions for you.”

“What?!”

“You won’t get away with this!”

“You can still save yourself if you let me go right now, you little snot!”

“I’ll tell you anything!”

Only one of them was playing along. I suspected that he was planning something, though.

“Are you kidding me?!”

“You dimwit! At times like these, you’re supposed to try and negotiate!”

“Don’t fall for it!”

Naturally, his allies started to shout him down.

“Shut up! We’ve already been captured! Too late to say anything now! I’ll tell you anything, young man, just spare my life! I don’t care what happens to the rest of these guys! Just spare me!”

Now he was so desperate that he was selling out his allies.

“Screw you, you piece of crap!” the others cried. His declaration only sowed the seeds of division even more. It was hard to tolerate listening to them shouting at each other, so I asked Eins for a favor. A single cry from him was enough to shut them up.

Now that it was quiet again, I moved on. “I’m going to ask questions, and I want answers. Just so you know, you’re being restrained by my familiars. You won’t find any keyholes on those bindings, so they’ll only come off when I command them to.”

For the purpose of hunting bandits, I came up with this new use for my metallic slimes. Even if they ran away from me like this, I could track them down using my familiar contracts as long as the slimes were still on them. Pursuing them would be simple. Not only that, but these slimes were resistant to physical attacks, so they were quite durable. Even I would have trouble prying them off.

“You think you’ve got guts, kid? I don’t know about familiars or whatever, but you’re not so tough if you’re using junk like this! You probably don’t have the guts to kill us, am I right?”

“I wouldn’t kill without good reason, but I’ll do it if I have to.”

“As if! You’re not planning on it, I can tell.”

“You’re not scaring anyone, punk.”

The men seemed convinced that they wouldn’t be killed, so they started to get full of themselves. I had no idea what happened to my Intimidate skill, but that sure would have been handy.

“Hey, I’ll tell you one more time. Let us go right now, and we’ll let you off easy.”

“Do you understand the position you’re in?” I asked. These bandits didn’t seem to be hiding their true strength, and I couldn’t see any secret plan they might have had either. My limour birds were watching the surrounding area, and they didn’t have any other men waiting to ambush me that I could see. I didn’t understand why they were so confident. “What will you do if I let you go in the first place? Turn yourselves in? Have a change of heart and get a real job, maybe?”

I snapped at the men, shutting them up. If they actually did express some level of remorse, I still wouldn’t have any reason to trust them. If I let them go, they would likely just continue their lives as bandits. That’s how it seemed to me, at least, so I operated off that assumption.

“If I let you go, you might just hurt more people,” I said. “I don’t want to kill you needlessly, no, but I’m not irresponsible enough to just let you go free.”

Now that I captured them, I was going to turn them in to the guards in some town. I couldn’t let them hurt any more people. If they tried to resist, then they would get what’s coming to them.

“Ha! You’re just trying to act cool.”

“Don’t get cocky, kid. Now that I really look, you’ve got some nice clothes, weapons, and armor. Familiars and magic too, I bet you’ve got a lot of money. If we sold all your stuff, I imagine we’d make some decent cash.”

“Rich kid, huh? I hate rich kids. You can get food and have fun without a care in the world, you look down on the poor, you think you’re better than us!” the man grumbled and grabbed the collar

around his neck. That was a bad idea. "Ugh, wh-what's with this collar?"

"Hey! What's wrong?!"

"It's t-tight..."

"I forgot to mention, I ordered the familiars around your necks to stay right up against your skin," I explained. It was easy enough to yank on the collars with enough force, but then the slimes would morph to make sure they didn't leave contact with the skin. It would only cause the collars to tighten around their necks. "And if you try to violently break free, get a certain distance away from me without permission, or attempt to attack me, the collars will choke you. And of course, I could order them to strangle you at any time if I wanted."

All the slimes would have to do was put pressure on the carotid artery for a certain amount of time to kill a person. They were like the slave collars that were standard in fantasy light novels. Except the strangling would be entirely on them in this case.

"I don't need your explanations!"

"Make it stop already!"

His neck was strangled and the pain got worse. He pulled it away from his neck some more to escape the pain, which only made it even tighter. The man did this repeatedly until he couldn't even speak anymore. But it wasn't quite enough pressure to make him pass out.

"What are you just watching for?!"

"He's gonna die!"

They finally seemed to feel like their lives were in danger, a look of panic on their faces. They emotionally and selfishly cried out, reminding me of my boss in my past life.

"So what?" I replied.



Chapter 4 Episode 35: The Bandits' True Intentions

They looked at me with disbelief.

"You serious?"

"He's seriously gonna die!"

"I don't know what your background is, but you're bandits now, aren't you? Are you really in any position to complain about being killed? Besides, I said I wouldn't kill you for no reason, but if you're going to be defiant and try to run away, I have no reason to go out of my way to keep you alive."

Bandit extermination missions generally involved killing them all. The reward could be higher if they were captured alive, but it wasn't a requirement. It was different if there was some need to extract information from them, but the adventurer's life tended to be the top priority.

"I've still got some questions I want to ask, if you're willing to talk," I said.

"Y-Yes! Of course! I'll tell you anything! I don't want to die!" the one cooperative man said again.

"Then I don't need all of you, so it's not much trouble for me if one of you dies."

"That's ridiculous!"

"How can you just kill someone like that?!"

"As if bandits like you should talk. You've killed people with those swords, right?" I said. At the same time, the suffering man passed out. I figured I'd done enough to scare them at that point. "Well, I should have warned you about the collars sooner, so I'll let you off easy this time." I ordered the slime collar to enlarge a bit.

"Hey..."

"Is he alive?"

"Who knows?" I said.

"What do you mean, who knows?"

"His chest is moving, so I'd guess he is. But if he dies, he dies." I got close to him, but not close enough to confirm if he was alive or dead. I didn't want someone to hit me in the back of the head while I was checking. "Besides, human blood, flesh, bones, and organs are all enjoyed by my familiars, so his corpse wouldn't go to waste. Don't worry about that."

The conscious men shuddered. Understandably, nobody cares how well their body is treated after they're dead. I was living life over again here, but I had no idea what happened to my body on Earth.

"Anyway, you'll be fine as long as you don't struggle. Just listen to me, and I won't kill you," I said. They finally went quiet, so I asked about the swords. "I'm looking for a missing person. He was traveling on the road up above in a carriage full of weapons heading to Keleban. Your swords are the same sort he was delivering, and they're all new too. I also checked those wooden boxes, and they contain metal. To get straight to the point, did you attack him?"

"Yes! We just stole these swords the other day. Same with what's in the boxes. I don't know the name of the guy or remember what he looked like, but that was probably him. He was on the road up there too."

"Sounds like I'm right, then. How did you attack him? All I learned when I asked around was that he used this road, but nobody saw anything suspicious."

"Yeah, we were just going to stop him and take his stuff, but one of our arrows hit his horse and it went berserk. He ended up tumbling off the side of the road. We're used to hiding any signs of our attacks, so we buried the wheel tracks and covered up the grass on the cliff where the carriage fell off, then took all the goods from the carriage and ran off."

"What happened to the coachman?"

"I don't know."

I didn't know how that could be. It's not like the carriage could've gone anywhere without him. "Don't hide anything. You killed him, didn't you?"

"No, we didn't! He was knocked out by the fall, so we just tied him up, and our pal here who's been sleeping this whole time used magic to make grass grow tall enough to hide him under it. Then we just stole his goods and left. We don't know what happened to him after that! It's true!"

"You really didn't kill him?" If they wanted to hide their crime, there was no sense in leaving the victim alive. I suspected that they were lying to make themselves look better.

"We didn't! He had no intention of killing him to begin with, we just wanted his food and goods! We weren't trying to make him fall off the road! We've never killed anyone, the coachman included!"

"What? Never? Aren't you bandits?"

"Our job was just to clean up after jobs and little things like that. The boss handled the main job to make sure there were no mistakes, so this is the first time we've attacked anyone personally. This goes for all of us, even the guys who were talking themselves up. The worst

we've done before was burglary or picking pockets."

"So you were scared, is that it?" I looked around, and one of the men who snapped at me before was glaring.

"I mean, we were bandits and all, but what's wrong with being afraid to kill people?! We're not like you or the boss, we can't just kill people like it's nothing!"

"Nonsense," I said. I felt my head cooling after hearing their points. "Is there something wrong with being afraid to kill people? No, that's the right way to feel. But I can't say I believe it. You say you were too scared to kill the man, but you didn't exactly help him either, did you?"

"So what? You saying we should've carried him back to town?"

"Did you look into what caused him to faint? Even if you don't have any medical knowledge, I'm sure you know that he could've been in danger if he banged his head. He might've looked safe outside, but you don't know that his head was fine inside. He could have died before ever waking up."

Not only that, but while there were few dangerous creatures in this region, it wasn't unusual to encounter goblins just about anywhere. The gods assured me that the Forest of Gana was relatively safe, but they were there too. If he was found unconscious and tied up, they undoubtedly would have killed him.

"You mentioned you don't know where he is, so you don't even know if he's safe. You weren't trying to make him fall off the cliff? You didn't kill him directly, so you claim not to have killed him? Don't be ridiculous."

Plenty of people die from accidents. That could include anything from traffic accidents to children engaging in dangerous games. Tons of people die all over the world every day. But accidents have no perpetrators. If it was a consequence of their crime, it's a murder. They violently robbed this man, and now he could be dead as a result. Then they left him without checking if he was safe. They couldn't claim that they didn't kill anyone after that.

"Gone silent again?" I said. "What happened to all your energy from before?"

"What, you're gonna lecture us, kid? What do you know?"

"A lecture? This isn't a lecture. You're saying you don't want to kill anyone, but all the while, you may have left someone to die. It disgusts me that you can boldly make these claims, that's all." And I had no time to waste with these people anyway.

"Wait! Wait a second! I helped you, didn't I?!"

"I'm not going to kill you, I just don't like you. Instead, I'm going to make you take me to where the carriage fell."

Three days after an incident on Earth, the rate of survival that

much time after an incident dropped considerably. And that was assuming they had food, water, and a way to keep warm. Without those, depending on whether there was an injury or not, the time limit was even shorter.

I opened my Dimension Home “I’m not going to kill you either, but you’ll be staying in here for a while. Next time you come out, you’ll be outside a guard station in some town,” I said as I picked up the bandit who slept the entire time and got to work confining him.



“Over here?!”

“Yes! No mistake about it, Young Master!”

“Quit calling me that, it’s creeping me out.”

“My apologies!”

I carried the man on a makeshift seat strapped to my back as we climbed up the unbeaten path. I had ordered the apologetic man to provide directions, and as expected, the scene of the crime was on the road near Keleban. But the bandits wandered the mountains for days and the only way they could find the way to the crash site was to head back to the road first. We gave up on walking straight to the crash site and decided to go to the road first. Thanks to the limour birds ahead of us, we didn’t get lost.

“I have another question,” I said.

“Of course! Anything you want!”

“You staged your attack two days ago, right? Why were you still in the forest? Normally you’d want to get away as soon as possible.”

“We climbed down the mountain at first, but there was nothing but plains and nowhere to hide. We’d look suspicious if we ran into anyone in these get-ups, so we just had to go back to the mountain.”

“Then if I hadn’t captured you, what were you planning to do?”

“Nothing much.”

“You didn’t even have a plan?”

“We had our hands full just running from bandit hunters.”

“How did you make it this far without a plan?”

“We had food from odd jobs before the bandit hunters came and still had it when we fled, so we ate that as we traveled here. But we ran out three days ago, so we had to steal from someone.”

That’s when they happened to target Pedro, presumably. “Why did you take the goods if you just needed food?”

“Our boss had ties with some merchant with whom he exchanged stolen goods and money for food and weapons. So we thought the goods could come in handy.”

“And do you know who that merchant is, exactly?”

“Well, no, but if we ever did get the chance to sell something to

them, it'd be unfortunate if we didn't have anything on hand, you know."

"So you had absolutely no plans at all, got it." I did often just operate on instinct too, but I was never this reckless. "I'm impressed you were able to survive as bandits at all."

"I just did random errands and followed orders. Cleaning and laundry were things I did back in my home village too."

"I think you'd be better off going home than staying as a bandit. Is there some reason you can't?"

"Yes, well, I punched the mayor and got exiled."

"Alright, I knew they had power, but you got exiled just for a fight? Why did you do that in the first place?"

"I think this is similar with most villages, but the mayor collects taxes to pay to the feudal lord. He and his family also manage the collected crops, and they can also write and do math. They take advantage of that to pocket some of the crops and money for themselves."

The man claimed that he ditched work and headed to an unpopulated area when he happened to pass by the mayor and his son discussing embezzlement behind a hut. He asked them about it and got no answer, so he got upset and punched the mayor. They drew a crowd, and the man was accused of the crime of threatening the mayor's son to steal taxes.

"They acted like the son was resisting and the mayor came to tell me to stop. I was the only one who heard the truth, so in the end, the villagers trusted the mayor over me. They all looked at me coldly, and the mayor exiled me for an attempted crime. And if I didn't leave the village, they threatened to tell the tax collector that I tried to steal taxes and get me the death penalty. I had no choice but to leave."

Any attempts to take a feudal lord's taxes would inevitably result in punishment, if not necessarily the death penalty. But the mayor only took extra from the villagers, while paying the proper amount of taxes each year. That was all he needed to convince the tax collector of anything. They wouldn't bother to do a proper investigation. Bribes could get tax collectors to turn a blind eye to some things, according to the man. I didn't know how much of this was true, but at any rate, this was why the man left the village.

"And then you became a bandit?"

"I worked at a shop in the city for a while, and tried adventuring, but I failed at everything, so that didn't last long. I had to steal to eat, and when it looked like I'd get caught, I ran away and eventually ended up as a bandit."

"Does the same go for the others?"

"I'm sure they've got similar stories. You never know where life

will take you. But if I had a good head on my shoulders, I never would've become a goddamned bandit to begin with. Oh, sorry! Excuse my language!"

"It's not like I asked you to speak politely."

As he was being self-disparaging, he accidentally let his feelings out. We didn't talk much after that, so we just silently climbed further up until I heard a limour bird call.

"Hey, we reached the road. Where do we go now?" I asked.

"Let me see here. It wasn't that high up, it was closer to the foot of the mountain."

"Left, then? Let's proceed along the road now. Tell me when we get to the right spot."

"Right."

We met up with my limour birds and kept walking for another hour.

"Wait!" the bandit said.

"Here?"

"Probably. Can you turn me around?"

"Is this good?"

"Oh, yes, it's past here. The path is around a corner a little to the right."

We went a bit further until the path zigzagged and we came to a corner hidden from view by trees when looking from a distance. It wouldn't even warrant mentioning if we didn't know what it hid, but there was a patch of weeds too.

"Here?"

"No doubt about it."

The man got off of me, then I tied a rope around a nearby tree and prepared to descend.

"What is it?" I asked. He was trying to look down off the cliff.

"Just wondering if he's alive," he said. It seemed a bit late now, but I guess he felt guilty.

"That's what I'm going to find out. Are you going to wait here?" I asked, but I was going to take him with whether he liked it or not.

"You'll find him faster if I guide you there."

"Alright, hold this," I said. If he was interested in going himself, I was having him descend himself. I handed him a rope and tied one end of it to the slime serving as his handcuffs. At the same time, I removed the bindings around his legs. "Whether we're taking him back alive or dead, you'll get in the way if I carry you, so climb down with your own legs. You can walk now. I'm having my bird familiars watch you and you still have that collar to contend with, so don't do anything stupid."

"R-Right."

I glared at the surprised man, then descended the steep slope. It didn't take long to find the missing person after that. Thanks to the guide I brought along, he wasn't difficult to locate. I cut through the weeds hiding him.

"Pedro! Can you hear me?!" I cried. He was still breathing. "I'm an adventurer! I'm here to save you! You're safe now!"

"Adventurer?" he mumbled. I kept talking to him as I rushed to remove the weeds wrapped around him. But I took the utmost caution not to put any burden on Pedro.

"Are you okay? Can you describe what state you're in?"

"Back... hurts..."

"Your back?"

I could see his face now, and his muffled voice became clearer. But his face was covered in sweat. I checked his forehead, and he had a high fever. He also showed signs of dehydration. It seemed like he had used up a lot of stamina. Thankfully he could still respond to questions, but he needed to be taken to town to receive treatment quickly.

"Hey! Get over here!"

"Right!"

I called the bandit over to the man he nearly killed, then handed him a feeding cup and a bottle from my Item Box. "Feed him the contents of this bottle. Don't force it, just a little at a time. Got it?"

"Y-Yes," the man said and timidly fed Pedro the water mixed with salt and sugar as I continued my work off to the side.

"Ugh?!" Pedro groaned and coughed.

"A-Are you okay?!" the bandit asked.

"Pedro."

"Ngh, my back..."

"Your back, right. Does your head not hurt?"

"My head's fine..."

His voice was much better after drinking water, but he was shivering. I checked if I had a blanket. "Ah, here we are. I'll put this blanket on you."

The weeds somehow seemed to have protected him from the cold wind at night up until now. I finished cutting him free from them. Next, I took a stretcher out of my Item Box.

"You've sure got a lot with you," the bandit said.

"I'm here on a job, of course I brought anything I thought I might use. Anyway, we need to take him back up. I'll free your hands now if you'll help."

"Right."

The whole carriage had fallen. Considering he passed out after that, there was a chance that he banged his head as well. I carefully

placed him on the stretcher and opened my Dimension Home. “You grab the other side. We’ll cautiously carry him inside.”

“Got it.”

This was the best way to transport Pedro without rocking him too much.

“Hey...” Pedro said.

“What is it?”

“Thanks, both of you...”

It was unclear if he remembered the bandit or not, but he thanked us. The bandit looked away awkwardly.

“Let’s go.”

Maybe he felt some internal conflict, but I wouldn’t let sentimentality stop him from assisting me. We had to get Pedro to town as soon as possible so he could get medical treatment.

“What?! Wait, hey!”

“I thought you said you wouldn’t kill us if we played along?!”

“I won’t, but the situation has changed. I need to restrain you more thoroughly so you can’t move at all.”

The one obedient man and I restrained the other bandits to make sure they did no harm to Pedro, then we both ran to the nearest town.

Chapter 4 Episode 36: Back Down the Mountain

The morning after I found Pedro.

“Thanks for cooperating with us so late last night.”

“No problem. Thanks for letting me stay over.”

“It’s fine. Here’s your reward money for the five bandits you turned in.”

“Thank you.”

I received a small bag from the female guard, then left the guard station in Keleban. It was still early in the morning, and few people were outside. The wind blew softly against my cheeks and cooled my body.

I was kind of exhausted. I ended up going on quite a wild goose chase the previous night, but I managed to track down Pedro. I let the guards at the station take care of him after I got to Keleban, but his injuries weren’t as serious as I thought. By this morning, it looked like he’d pull through. I had heard that beastkin could take a lot of punishment, but maybe they were even harder to kill than I imagined. What he needed right now was rest, and it seemed like it could be a while before his back pain was gone, but as long as he stayed alive, he could manage. I was glad that the worst-case scenario had been avoided. It wouldn’t be easy for him, but he did have an acquaintance who cared enough to put out a search request for him, so I had no doubt he would be fine in the end.

I tripped and almost dropped my bag. I heard the silver coins clatter inside. For every bandit captured alive, whether a bounty was on their head or not, you could be rewarded with two thousand sute. It was a surprisingly high reward, meant to encourage adventurers to voluntarily take bandit-hunting jobs despite the danger.

Incidentally, the bandits I captured were doing time in prison with penal labor. The reward money was paid for with the labor of the captured bandits. This meant that the five bandits I handed over were going to be taken somewhere, and that would be their life after that. When they learned that Pedro was still alive but couldn’t move, they seemed to feel some remorse, and they were shockingly obedient in the end. I prayed that they could get through their sentence without any issues and make a return to society.

I wandered around a bit until I came across a building that looked

like a church. It was about the size of the church in Gimul, but the gate was beautifully constructed and there were banners and such decorating the outside. An old monk and five young monks were cleaning the grounds, so this was most probably a church.

On that note, when I first came to this town, the guards told me that there were churches for two different religions here. One was Creationism, and the other was Divinity; they both worshiped the same gods. I didn't think about it too much, but the church I went to in Gimul was dedicated to Creationism.

"Are you lost?" the old man asked and approached me as I was staring at the building.

"No, sorry. This is a church, right?"

"Yes, a Divinity church."

"It is? I've never seen such a beautiful church before, so I was surprised."

"I see, I see. Are churches like this rare? Would you like to see the chapel?"

"The chapel? I don't know, I'm a follower of Creationism."

"We worship the same gods; the differences in our religions are trivial, and the gods love us all equally. You're free to pray here if you have the time."

"I'd be happy to, then."

I was in no particular rush and didn't want to reject his offer, so I decided to go with the man. We climbed a grand staircase made of stone and entered the building, setting foot on the crimson carpet. The monks we passed by welcomed me with smiles.

"This is the chapel," the man said. "Come in."

Beyond the door, there were lines of candle stands made of polished brass, and a path to an altar with statues of the gods. There were benches in muted colors to each side of the path for followers to sit and pray. Nobody seemed to be here yet.

"No need to be reserved. Approach the altar," the monk said. I did as told and prayed as close to the statues as I could.

The same phenomenon happened as in the other church. The monk was apparently right that the difference in religion was irrelevant. The instant I began to pray, I felt light surround me. I was so used to this by now that it actually felt relieving.



"Welcome!"

"Whoa!"

Soon after I came to the divine realm, I was greeted by Lulutia in an oddly excited manner. Honestly, I couldn't keep up with her energy.

"We have a special guest, you two!" she said.

"Is someone else here?"

I turned to see who Lulutia was talking to. There were two goddesses I didn't recognize. One was a kindly middle-aged woman who looked refined, like a noble. The other was a warrior, both beautiful and wild. The two contrasting goddesses were sitting at a table and drinking tea.

"Oh my, a new guest? Welcome. We'll need more tea and snacks," said the refined woman.

"Neat! I've heard about you, but I didn't believe you'd actually come when summoned," said the warrior.

"Pleasure to meet you. I'm Ryoma Takebayashi."

"I know," the refined woman said. "You're the boy who came from Earth, aren't you? I'm Wilieris, the goddess of land and harvests. Thank you so much for coming to our world and protecting the lives of people and monsters. Make yourself at home. You feel comfortable around Lulutia, don't you? I hope you can feel the same around me."

"Well, I suppose." Out of all the gods I'd met to this point, she was definitely the most cordial.

"And I'm Kiriluel, the goddess of war and judgment. It's a pleasure."

"Likewise, thanks for having me." I knew she was a god of combat. She could probably do me some favors.

"Why so stiff? Come on, Ryoma, loosen up a bit!"

"I may be used to coming here, but meeting two new goddesses in one day is kind of a new thing for me. Just let me get used to it. So, did something happen, Lulutia?"

"Just having a little chat between us girls. I hear that's a thing on Earth. But we totally ran out of things to talk about."

"Oh, I think the other gods mentioned something about this." I suppose this meant that it had been going on for two days, though. "I suppose there's only so much to discuss if you keep things going that long."

"Then she dragged me into it to try and liven up the conversation. I tried to get something going, but it didn't work out so great," Kiriluel said while narrowing her eyes at Lulutia.

"Your topics of conversation are just too extreme. Disputed territories? What kind of girl would want to chat about that?!"

"You're the one who wanted to talk about current events, Lulutia!"

"Sorry about them, I was hoping they'd give a proper explanation instead of bickering between themselves," said Wilieris. "Have some tea and cakes."

"Thank you," I said, accepting what Wilieris offered.

“What brought you to the church, by the way? Did you have some business with someone?”

“Not in particular. I just happened to pass by, and a monk invited me inside. Did Lulutia do something?”

“One moment,” she said and shut her eyes. The other gods often did the same when they were looking into something. “Looks like she didn’t do anything. The decision to invite you into the church was that man’s alone. It seems like he wanted to sway you toward his religion.”

“Was that his intention?”

“That’s what it looks like. He’s not a bad person, though. You look like a child, so it doesn’t seem like he plans on asking you for donations. He simply wants to proselytize. Divinity as a religion is proactive about converting others and collecting charity, but that gives them a lot of spending power, so they do a lot of work for orphans and those in poverty. Many of their followers care deeply about helping others, so I hope you don’t get the wrong idea about them.”

Wilieris was as mild-mannered as her appearance suggested. I found religions kind of sketchy, so she backed them up. Their main goal may have been to convert people, but maybe it was rude of me to question their value. Or it was rude to question the motives of that monk, at the very least.

“Got it, thank you,” I said.

“No problem. To tell the truth, the kind of clergy members you’re worried about do exist. Caution is important, especially in your case. You were blessed not only by Lulutia, but by Gain and Kufo as well, weren’t you?”

“Yes, and Tekun too.”

“I see. There have been others in the past with multiple blessings, but it’s extremely rare. If people learn that you have four whole blessings, you’re sure to hear from a lot of churches. The Church of Divinity in particular refers to blessed people as saints and worships them in much the same way they do the gods, so if they find out about you, there’s a good chance that you’ll be given a burden you don’t want to have. I wouldn’t want that for you either, so be careful.”

“Thank you so much for telling me.”

“Can we quit talking about this already?” Kiriluel said to Lulutia.

“It’ll never end otherwise,” Lulutia replied. It sounded like they had just finished arguing. “Oh, what were you two talking about?”

“About the person who invited me into the chapel,” I said.

“Oh, him.”

“He happened to show up at an awfully convenient time, so he thought that may have been your doing, Lulutia,” Wilieris explained.

“Oh, I wouldn’t go that far!”

“I confirmed that myself, I know.”

Lulutia was acting a bit troublesome today. Maybe she was trying to set the mood for this whole meetup she was holding.

“By the way, Ryoma, has anything happened with you lately?” she asked.

“Wow, awkward segue much? I was running around the mountains on a job to find a missing person up until a few hours ago.” I explained everything that had gone on up to the previous night.

“That sounds like it was rough,” Lulutia said.

“My familiars did a lot of the work this time around. I feel like the slimes and limour birds did almost everything, actually.” In fact, I was starting to think that was pretty normal for me. Not like I was trying to be lazy, though.

“But you were the one who extracted information from the bandits, weren’t you?”

“Couldn’t you just say that you all worked together?”

“Just remember to reward them when you get back. They deserve it,” Kiriluel said.

“Of course.”

The limour birds in particular had to fly for hours during their search, and it was them who found the bandits. I wanted to treat them after we got back to Gimul.

When I told that to Kiriluel, she gave me a carefree smile. I had heard from someone that the war god hated people from other worlds, but she didn’t give me that impression. She actually seemed nice and friendly.

“Hm? What? Something on my face?” she asked. I almost told her that it was nothing, but there was no use in lying to the gods. Instead, I told her what was on my mind. “No human has ever called me friendly before. I hate people from other worlds? Who told you that? Fernobelia’s the one who hates people from other worlds.” The goddess herself didn’t seem to know what I was talking about.

“I don’t remember who mentioned it, but it was one of the gods.”

“Maybe it has something to do with compatibility,” Wilieris suggested. She seemed to know something. “You know how people from Earth see things differently than we do.”

“True, a lot of their personalities don’t really mesh with mine.” I couldn’t say it was impossible, but from my perspective, she seemed easy to communicate with.

“Try and remember,” Wilieris said. “This is the first time you’ve been able to talk to someone from another world like this.”

“None of the others did much more than stare at me.”

“I see. If you couldn’t talk to them for long, you couldn’t have befriended them,” I said.

“Kiriluel’s role and the standards by which we select humans to bring over may have been a problem too,” said Wilieris.

I asked if she could explain in more detail. According to her, whenever they summoned people from Earth, the Earth god prepared a few candidates. Of those candidates, the gods here selected me. Sometimes there were candidates that clearly couldn’t adapt to this world, who had dangerous views, or who had overly violent personalities, and they were never chosen.

“That’s why we have a tendency to select people with no history of fighting. And Kiriluel is a war goddess, you know. She hates those who abuse the weak or cause needless bloodshed, but approves of hunting or fighting to protect others, even if it means war. Right?” Wilieris asked Kiriluel.

“I don’t object to anyone who does all they can to survive, whether bugs, animals, monsters, or humans. If that means taking up a weapon and fighting, I can’t disapprove. To use a phrase from your home world, it’s survival of the fittest. If you can solve problems by talking things out, that’s fine, but sometimes you have to fight. There are a fair number of people who don’t accept that, and they think I’m just needlessly promoting war and view me as an evil god. I don’t get along with those people so much.”

It sounded like there was some resentment there, but I understood where she was coming from. If I were treated that way, I would probably think the same thing. She also couldn’t intervene and clear up those misunderstandings, so that made matters worse.

“Ryoma, you were comfortable with fighting from the start, weren’t you?” Lulutia asked.

“I did have to survive in the forest for three years, after all.”

“You have no issues with hunting or killing bandits too,” Kiriluel said. “I’ve got no reason to hate you. Seems like you were pretty strong to begin with too.”

“Thank you.”

Kiriluel had a high opinion of me. Hearing praise for my strength from the war goddess was honestly delightful.

“I’ve got an idea!” she said. “How about we have a fight? You and me.”

“Uh, excuse me?”

She made an abrupt and very strange request of me.

Chapter 4 Episode 37: Beyond Crime and Punishment

“Not on my watch, you won’t,” Wilieris said, putting a stop to the fight before it could begin.

“Come on, at least let us fight a little,” Kiriluel complained. “Not like he comes to visit every day, and nobody’ll get hurt as long as we fight here.”

“I won’t allow it. Ryoma may look human right now, but he’s just a soul in this form. You won’t hurt his body, but you could hurt his soul. Those wounds could be even more serious, if anything. If it went wrong, you could destroy his mind. If you absolutely insist on fighting, you should either ask Tekun to provide armor of some sort, or see if Fernobelias can help.”

Wilieris went from mild-mannered to stern and unyielding. Kiriluel was blatantly annoyed, but I didn’t especially want to get my mind destroyed either.

“Maybe I can ask Tekun, but talking to Fernobelias is a huge pain. As if he’d help anyway.”

“Would you rather she taught you how to use your Intimidate skill instead, Ryoma? You said something about not knowing how to use it.”

“Yes. I have a feeling it could be useful.”

“There, isn’t that more productive? Can you explain it, Kiriluel?”

“It’d be easier to understand through practice than through words,” Kiriluel said. “Well, I’m sure you’ll be back some more in the future, so we can try it then. The Intimidate skill is honestly tough to handle, I think.”

“What does that mean? Am I not strong enough?”

“No, the opposite. Anyone as strong as you should be able to use it naturally. Listen, the Intimidate skill is about playing on your foe’s fears and instincts. When you’re good enough at it, you should be able to prevent the enemy from taking action and use it for feint attacks. In a battle between two master fighters, you’ll always see this technique come up. You’re in that class of fighter, so you can use it just fine in battle. The thing is that if you’re not in the right mood, you can’t use it at all. Like if you can’t make your voice sound threatening, any huge guy will be more intimidating no matter how weak he is.”

The Intimidate skill could appear on someone even in everyday

life, but in those cases, it would only be Level 1 or 2.

"Think about it like this," Kiriluel continued. "You see a big guy. He's squatting on the ground and trembling. He's sobbing and wetting himself. Then he shouts, 'I'll kill you!' Are you afraid of that guy?"

"No, I would probably just find him kind of creepy."

"Yeah, probably. Words alone aren't enough to frighten someone. You need the right attitude and intent too."

"I see. How does that work for me, though? I can evidently still intimidate people with this body, and I take a pretty dauntless attitude too. I've successfully intimidated people before, but sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't."

"In your case, it's probably a problem of the heart. You're Japanese, right? Those people are all about talking things out peacefully and thinking everyone can come to an understanding."

"Kiriluel, I think your viewpoint is terribly skewed. But Japan is considered more peaceful than the average country, I guess."

"Really? Most of the Japanese that have come here were like that, though."

"Have a lot of Japanese people been brought here?"

"Yes, well, we mentioned how we pick the safest people to bring over," Lulutia said. "Perhaps a relatively high proportion of those people are Japanese."

"Of course, we also select people from outside Japan," Wilieris added.

"Most of them either get used to the way we do things here or turn a blind eye to it, but some insist on pacifism and die because of it. I could never understand it, but you have to admire their commitment."

I had no idea there were people like that, but we were getting off topic, so I tried to get things back on track.

"So yeah, I'm sure there are all kinds of different people in Japan, but it's fair to say it's a peaceful country, right?" Kiriluel asked.

"Yes."

"And when you lived there, did you regularly threaten people of your own will?"

"No, I can't say I did," I admitted. Sometimes people were scared by my appearance, but never because I wanted them to be. In fact, my frightening appearance made me need to compensate by trying to act less scary. Not that it was ever enough back then.

"That's what I thought. You formed a habit. You can be intimidating when you really have to be, but you probably hold back subconsciously. Seems like you developed in kind of an irregular way, too."

I was curious about what she meant by that last part, but before I

could ask, Wilieris and Lulutia glared at Kiriluel like they thought it was rude. “Well, anyway, there you have it. It’s a problem of the heart,” she concluded, awkwardly shifting away from the subject. I still wondered what she was talking about, but decided to ask her another time. “And problems of the heart aren’t my specialty. You’ve got this thing you call counseling in your world, I think? Never done that before. And I’m sure you’d have to do it for a while to see the effects of it. Personally, I learn better through actions than through words, and teach better that way too. So, if we could just—”

“No, you’re not going to fight,” Wilieris interjected.

“Fine, I got it. Then not much I can do for you, honestly. Take your time learning through experience. You’ll get the hang of it eventually.”

“So I just have to practice, and there are no shortcuts?”

“That’s the idea. Your body’s still got room to grow, so if you want to get stronger than you are now, you’ve got plenty of time.”

Fair enough. I was hardly above the age of ten, so it wasn’t like I only had another decade or two to improve. I planned on hunting more bandits in the future too, so I’d have ample opportunities. Which reminded me of something on my mind.

“On another subject, do you think it’s possible to rehabilitate bandits after capturing them?” I asked. I hoped that the bandits I captured could be rehabilitated, so I wanted their opinion. But they looked conflicted about it.

“Unfortunately, it’s common for criminals to go on to commit more crimes,” said Lulutia. “Bandits who were part of guilds get banned after their arrest, so even after they’re released from prison, they can’t rejoin, so it becomes difficult for them to find employment. Of course, it’s not impossible to find work without the aid of a guild, but most employers use guilds to find vetted workers.”

“Unlike in Japan, the concept of self-defense is commonplace here,” said Kiriluel. “Not a lot of people are going out of their way to hire former felons if it’d put them at risk.”

“I hear that you’ve hired people from the slums,” said Wilieris. “But much of the population won’t even hire them, even if their records are clean, because of preconceived notions about their criminality.”

I had to sympathize with them. In a way, I understood how employers felt. The thought of hiring someone who might do harm to my employees was frightening. But there was a specific memory that ran through my head.

“I think it would be a bit better for everyone if they could get jobs, though,” I said.

“Maybe, depending on how much they regret their crimes, how

much they're willing to change, and how much they can tolerate the prejudice they'll face," Lulutia said. "I do think that giving them employment would make their rehabilitation easier, though."

"Is something on your mind?" Wilieris asked.

"Something that happened to me in the past," I said. "Do you know about my past, Wilieris?"

"Nothing that would be relevant to this conversation."

"Me neither," Kiriluel said. "Wilieris and I don't involve ourselves in picking people to bring over from Earth. All we know is what Lulutia and the others tell us, or what we see of your lives here. Takes time to memorize everything about a person's life anyway." I thought that all the gods knew about me, but that made sense.

"A lot happened to me when I was younger. I can laugh about it now, though. I'm rather proud of how far I've come, I suppose."

Wilieris, Kiriluel, and Lulutia to a lesser extent responded with fascinated gasps. I guess I said something curious.

"Ryoma, would you mind telling us a bit about that?" Lulutia asked. "You don't have to, but we're out of things to talk about." That was understandable, considering they had been doing this for three days.

"Sure, I suppose so. It's all water under the bridge anyhow," I said. "Just try not to yell at me if you get bored. I can't promise it'll be too interesting."



It was my first year out of school. On the way home from work late at night, I was shopping at a convenience store when I had the misfortune of running into three muggers. None of them were even hiding their faces, but they had guns and fired them at the ceiling. There was an uproar in the store, but they cackled and glared at the customers, demanding everyone's wallets, including mine. They ordered the cashier to hand over all the money too.

They sounded drunk and something was off about their voices that's still eerie as I think back to it. I could at least surmise from their words and actions that they didn't have the best mental health. The cashier was scared into trying to get the store's money to these three, but he was trembling, tripping over himself, and dropping coins everywhere. The three muggers kept laughing and urging him to hurry up.

The biggest problem came a moment later, when something seemed to occur to one of them. He shouted and suddenly pointed his gun at a woman in the store, gleefully declaring that he would kill her to set an example. That was when I took action. I can't imagine that the man was entirely sane, but I took him to be serious about what he

said.

All of the men were now directing their attention to the woman, like they were expecting to see some entertainment. They didn't even notice me, so suppressing them was simple. But in the process, I ruptured one of the mugger's internal organs, fractured another's skull, and damaged the third's subclavian artery. When the police finally arrived, I was accused of unjustifiable self-defense and taken into custody. They might have even assumed I was a mugger.

I didn't go along voluntarily or even get the chance to explain myself. I remembered being handcuffed and taken to the police car by force. At the station, I think I was first questioned about unjustifiable self-defense, but I was pretty frantic at the time and my memories are vague. In any case, what I remember most is the astonishment and fear with which I was viewed by officers when I arrived.

My stay in custody was repeatedly extended, during which time a few details were established:

- All of the men I attacked were armed with handguns, whereas I was unarmed.
- A later investigation uncovered that the men were all using illegal substances.
- Considering how they fired the guns after entering the store, there was presumed to be a high chance that they would really shoot the woman.
- Because there were three of them, there was a high chance that they would have struck back even after they'd been disarmed, so it was unthinkable that I could have held back in that moment.
- I did inflict heavy wounds, but I only attacked them by knocking their guns out of their hands with my arm and delivering a single strike to each of them.
- I told someone to swiftly contact the police and a hospital right after attacking them, and treated their wounds to the extent that I could.
- Security cameras recorded everything and proved that I attacked them as little as possible.
- Witnesses to the incident provided testimony that said the same.

With all that information, my actions were deemed to be justified. I was declared innocent by the law, but the story doesn't end there. While I was in custody, news spread that a single man had fought and heavily injured three men with guns. Much commotion was made about it. I was treated like a hero at first, but then the media approached the families of the muggers for interviews.

"My son did something wrong, but did he have to be beaten so

badly?!" one of their elderly family members said.

"If there wasn't a hospital nearby, he could have died!" cried another.

After that, I started getting demonized online and in magazines on a daily basis. By the time I was finally free to go, there was no place for me at my company anymore. The reason given was that, while I did save someone, they couldn't ignore that I nearly killed three people. Once friendly co-workers no longer dared to approach me. They disparaged me behind my back, calling me a piece of shit who never got what I deserved. The story had started to fade from the memory of the general public by this time, but it wasn't so easy for my coworkers to forget.

Less than a week after I returned to work, I was called to a meeting with my boss and an executive at the company. They wanted me to resign.

"It seems like you fully intended to keep serving our company, but you have to understand something," the executive said. "It's going to be difficult for all of us if you stay, yourself included. Quit your job here and find another path in life. I believe you're behind in your work too, aren't you? Personally, I think this is the best thing I can do for you."

When my boss heard that, he even prostrated himself to the executive on my behalf. But he wasn't convinced, and in the end, I agreed to quit my job.

"The responsibility for any losses and the dissatisfaction from coworkers that would come about as a result of you staying would probably be directed at the man who kept you here," the executive said to ultimately persuade me.

That man would be my boss. He was a great person. He would clean up after his subordinates' messes and voice his disagreements with superiors if they had unreasonable demands. He was harsh when it came to work, but dependable and respectable. While I was in custody, he even helped pay bail for me. He was also a loving father who loved to display pictures of his three children, calling them his treasures. I owed a lot to him, and the company was willing to threaten his position. That being the case, I decided to leave the company.

"Thank you for everything," he said at the end. He sounded frustrated and apologetic, but also somewhat relieved. I had burdened him a lot, so it was to be expected.

I looked for a new workplace after that, but because I quit my first place of employment after so short a time, nobody would hire me and I didn't even get a chance to explain why I quit in interviews. Eventually, I found the company that I worked at until I died, one of

the most abusive of businesses.



“And that’s the story. What do you think?” I asked. I tried to make light of it, but the goddesses looked sour. I can’t say I was expecting that positive a reaction in the first place, though.

“I don’t know what to say. That’s definitely contrary to everything I’ve heard about Japan,” Wilieris said.

“You mean the incident that happened? Yes, I think that’s extremely uncommon. Illegal substances are thoroughly restricted in Japan, and there are hardly any gun-related crimes. But that doesn’t mean these things never happen at all.”

A year never went by when there wasn’t news of someone being arrested for drug possession, and sometimes that news was about athletes or actors. It was rare, but it happened. The three muggers just happened to be using some.

“Anyway, isn’t it weird how the police responded?” Kiriluel asked. “Between you and the muggers, it’s pretty clear who was in the wrong. So why’d you have to be detained for so long? Plus, nasty rumors were spread about you and you even lost your job. But now you talk about it like it was no big deal. How?” Kiriluel sounded like she couldn’t comprehend it. Of all the gods I had met, her emotions were the easiest to understand.

“Well, like I said, it’s all water under the bridge now. And I don’t understand everything that happened at the time myself.”

I did think that the way the police acted was strange, but they wouldn’t tell me what was going on internally. The media was also as sensational then as in the modern day. I didn’t know exactly where everyone in my company or neighborhood got their news, but once one of them heard something about me, they could all share it with each other.

“I thought about it a lot at the time, but now I just have to assume that I got unlucky. I don’t know who could have set up such a situation on purpose, short of a god or something,” I said with a smile, but then I realized I said something I shouldn’t have. The three goddesses all frowned. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said that.”

“Huh?” said Lulutia.

“Oh?” said Wilieris.

“What are you apologizing for?” said Kiriluel.

I had thought that they weren’t pleased about me blaming a god. I didn’t intend to say it was their fault or anything, but if I were a god, I wouldn’t care for humans accusing gods of causing their misfortune. We were kind of friends, but that didn’t mean I could forget my manners. Especially when I was meeting two of these goddesses for

the first time. There are some things you just shouldn't say. That's how I felt, at least, so I explained how I felt.

"Oh, no, no, you're totally off the mark there," said Kiriluel.

"What she said. We aren't offended at all, don't worry," said Lulutia.

"Indeed," said Wilieris. "We know you weren't talking about us, and it's reasonable that you would think that way in your situation." That was good to hear, but it didn't explain their reactions a moment ago. "By the way, is that experience related to what you said about jobs for criminals?"

"Oh, yes. After what I went through, I think I can understand the anxiety over not having work, how hard life is for them, and how cruelly they're viewed by society."

But it wasn't just former criminals who lived those lives. People from the slums were in a similar position and had to endure it despite their innocence. There were a few times in my past life where it all felt like too much for me to bear, and I had been held in custody and nearly brought to court myself. But I still felt like I managed to live honestly to the very end.

Maybe that's why I was irked by those bandits. They became bandits of their own will, they worked for a killer, but they still insisted that they were against killing, and that they never killed anyone because they didn't do it personally. That they felt comfortable claiming that was disgusting. I hated that they thought they had no other options. But there was no point in just taking out that anger on them.

While both this world and Japan had inequality, everyone had certain protections under the law. The state couldn't punish anyone without a trial, and if they did, they would themselves be breaking the law. And criminals did time in prison, so one could say that they already paid for their crimes by the time they were released. That doesn't change the fact that those crimes were committed, of course, and that remained on their criminal record. Those with a criminal record had a fair chance of committing crimes again, so I could understand the distrust toward them.

That being said, it seemed unreasonable to expect them to suffer and work for unfairly low wages in miserable working conditions. People can feel as negatively about their crimes as they wish, but under the law, it was up to the courts and the judges to decide the sentence for their crime and punishment. Once that sentence was completed and they were out of prison, that should have been enough to make up for their crimes.

If anyone after that didn't think the sentence was good enough, they were allowed to have those feelings, but to subject people to

abuse because they had criminal records was akin to punishing them without a trial. Imposing their own punishment on a criminal for breaking the law when the law said that it was up to the court to impose punishments on criminals didn't seem sensible. This distrust toward former felons and fear that they would inevitably commit crimes again only put them in a position where they would even more likely commit another crime, so I felt like it was all illogical. And most of all, if we would just give these former felons proper job opportunities, they wouldn't be able to use the excuse that they had no choice if they committed a crime again.

"I get what you're saying, but aren't you overthinking things?" Kiriluel asked. "Feels kind of theoretical."

"I don't know how it seems to you, but I've always been like this," I said with a laugh.

I was the type who always read the rules or the manual first, and when I was young, I was called especially straight-laced. Even now, the way I dealt with the bandits was like an extreme version of that.

"Knew it, just like when we talked about intimidation," Kiriluel said quietly.

"What do you mean?"

"Most people would avoid former felons, obviously. The reason being that, like you said, they could be dangerous. They worry about their own safety in the event that something happened, but you don't have to be so concerned about that. In both your past world and this one, you're an especially strong person. But even you've actually faced danger like that unlucky incident you got into, right?"

"I suppose so. Not so much by the end of my life there, though."

"So look, in your case, you can be attacked by muggers and win that confrontation just fine. That's why you don't even have to try and intimidate them, and you can even get close to giving their targets a helping hand. And if they try to attack you, you can just beat them up yourself."

"You think it's because I'm confident?"

"Fact of the matter is that random tough guys are no match for you, and you've gotten through misfortune that'd normally be unthinkable. Yeah, maybe you've got some subconscious confidence. What you make of that is up to you. Anyway, there aren't a lot of guys who think the way you do, let alone put those thoughts into action."

"Your ideas are logical and idealistic," said Wilieris. "In a nation of laws, I think that's the right perspective to take. But unfortunately, Kiriluel is right that most people react to former felons with fear and aversion. That's entirely natural and it's hard to blame them. Suppressing that emotional response with logic and choosing to offer assistance instead isn't easy. I don't think you need me to tell you

that.”

“I lived for thirty-nine years, yes, I like to think I understand how emotions can be a nuisance. I can’t count the number of times I wished that we could solve everything with theories,” I said. Wilieris looked at me like a mother at her child and poured tea into my empty cup. “I know that what I’m saying is idealistic and that it won’t easily be realized. That’s what makes it an ideal. Reality is different.”

“But despite understanding reality, you won’t give up on your ideals?” Wilieris asked, getting at the core of what I was feeling. But while I felt like that was correct, something was wrong and I wasn’t sure what. But my doubts were dispelled unexpectedly quickly.

“On Earth, there’s a concept in religion called divine grace,” I said. “Presumably the way gods influence us in our everyday lives and help us. Maybe some receive the grace of the gods. But if some do, there must be others who don’t.”

I happened to actually receive the grace of this world’s gods out of all possible candidates, the only reason I was here now. And as I thought back on it, my life since I reincarnated had been nothing but happiness. I had absolute freedom and lived to my heart’s content. I met friendly people and was never left wanting for money. Everything was perfect, almost too perfect. I could never have imagined enjoying each day so much before.

That was my reality now, but as the bandit who guided me talked about, being falsely accused of crimes and forced into life as a criminal were still very real issues in this world. I myself often told myself that I had no choice when problems arose in my life on Earth. They must have despised this reality.

As I kept thinking about it, I couldn’t help but start grinning. “Is this just escapism too?”

“Escapism has a rather negative connotation,” Wilieris said. “But it still looks like you’re enjoying it to me.”

“Yes, I guess so. Maybe I am having fun right now.”

I had no choice. This was reality. I kept thinking that to myself, but as I did, smoldering emotions started to ignite in my heart. I remembered this feeling. It was a feeling that I stubbornly refused to give up as a child, but that I naturally repressed as a working adult.

“I refuse to accept that reality has to be this way. That’s the only answer I can give you, Wilieris,” I said, gazing right into her eyes.

These were my true feelings. A lot of things about the world were absurd. There were times when I knew things were wrong, but I couldn’t say so. There were times when I had to tolerate things that shouldn’t have been necessary. I didn’t want to accept the world as it was, but I had to convince myself that there was no other way. Now, however, that was in the past.

“Maybe this is the kind of thing children say when they don’t understand reality,” I said. “But I can’t honestly think that I’m wrong about this. Is it because I was reincarnated as a child?”

“Oh my, were you not always like this?” Wilieris asked.

“The documentation on his life before reincarnation did say he was relatively stubborn,” said Lulutia.

“What?! According to who? The Earth god?” I asked. “Lulutia, can you let me look at that documentation for just a little bit?”

“No, we can’t have that! It’s for the eyes of the gods only! But I think the description of your personality was pretty accurate. It also mentioned how logical you are. Stubborn, logical, and possessing unique sensibilities. But after everything you experienced throughout school and work, you repressed yourself and conformed to the world around you. Tough to live within a community when you can’t be yourself, I’ll bet.”

“Well, I can’t argue with that.”

Kiriluel and Wilieris looked at Lulutia and me with smiles. That was when the soft light began to shine brighter.

“Oh, it seems that our time is almost up,” Wilieris said.

“You had a lot to say here, but what do you plan to do now?” Kiriluel asked.

“Well, I do enjoy the life I’m living and the freedom I’m afforded. I want to hold onto that. I have plans to open more laundromats, and I have no intention of abandoning those. In another couple decades, I should be able to hire quite a number of people. I’ll also keep researching slimes, and maybe other things if I think of something else. I have the duke’s family and plenty of other people who I’m sure will help me if I need it, so I think I can ensure my own happiness. But I’d like to take the happiness I’ve been granted and spread it around. I’m going to try and pursue my ideals more. To do that, I think I’ll have to learn more about this country and the world, but I’m only eleven, so I have time to spare. Unless there’s some reason that I’d have to give up on my ideals, that is.”

Much of my happiness was thanks to the people around me and the luck I had been blessed with. Maybe that was thanks to the blessings of the gods, but whether it was through my own work or not, I was happy. And all I thought about was making sure I stayed happy. Even when it came to expanding my business in the ways I was recommended, I was cautious, if not entirely passive.

But now, I wanted to proactively seek happiness. This world was already close to ideal for me, so I could be satisfied with my current life. But I was granted a chance at a second life, so maybe that was all the more reason to pursue perfection even more. I did more than enough giving up in my past life. If there was a reason for me to give

up in this one, I couldn't think of it.

When I said all of this and puffed out my chest, Wilieris gave me a cheerful smile and said, "It's true, you are eleven now. That's far too early to be giving up on your dreams. In fact, no matter how old you are, whether you choose to pursue your ideals or not is up to you. You are your own person. I did say that your ideas will be hard for everyone to accept, but I respect your desire to help others. I pray that you retain those feelings throughout your life."

Wilieris exuded such a godly aura that I couldn't help but bow to her. Then I took a painful slap to the back. "What was that for, Kiriluel?" I asked.

"No need to bow to her," she said. "That wasn't a divine decree or anything. You know, sometimes you seem kind of like a certain crafty jerk in glasses I know, but sometimes you're surprisingly dumb." I wasn't too pleased to be called an idiot by a god. The crafty jerk in glasses I had to assume was Fernobelia, the God of Magic.

"Well, I like people who are dumb the way you are," she continued. "Like I said before, I have nothing against fights. Fighting isn't just about trying to win; it's about giving something everything you've got. Where there is conflict, changes and developments naturally arise. However you choose to live, you're sure to end up in some sort of struggle. Even if you just live passively. And if you pursue your ideals, there will be too many conflicts to count. You might lose or run plenty of times and that's fine. You can always get stronger and try again later. You only live once, so fight the fights you want to, or else you'll regret it." That was a unique way of putting it, but she was definitely supportive.

I was about to say thank you to Kiriluel and Wilieris, but then Kiriluel suddenly shouted before the words were fully out of my mouth. "Gah, you're so formal!" she cried.

"Ryoma, you've spent enough time with us now to relax a bit, right?" Wilieris asked.

"Whatever, just, thanks, both of you."

"Alright!" said Kiriluel.

"Take care of yourself until next we meet," Wilieris said with a giggle. "I'll introduce you to my husband next time."

"We don't get a lot of humans around here. I'll watch to see what you're doing once in a while too. And let's have a fight some time."

"Wait! Where's my thanks?!" whined Lulutia, but my mind was already returning to my body.



Chapter 4 Episode 38: For the Future

It was night by the time I returned to Gimul. When I stopped by the laundromat, my employees greeted me.

“Were you having dinner?” I asked when I saw them at the table.

“Would you like to eat too?”

“It’s raining outside, you must be cold. At least have some soup.”

Starting with Chelma, all the women stopped eating to get some food for me. I happily accepted the soup and swallowed a spoonful. It warmed me from the inside out. “Thank you,” I said.

“It was nothing. We’re glad you’re back.”

“What was the job you were on?”

“It all started pretty abruptly.”

I explained how I happened to run into someone at the guild who was looking for a missing person, how I took his request, and how I ended up finding the person.

“Then I took him to Keleban, said hello to my acquaintances there, and came home.”

“Glad to hear that you saved him!”

“That was certainly some good fortune. I also delivered the goods he was supposed to deliver, and the weapon shop owner understood he had been hurt, so he should still be able to get work in the future. Oh, that reminds me,” I said, opening my Item Box. “Carme, look at this.”

“A list of magic items?” he said. “And the Dinome Magic Item Workshop worked with the Morgan Trading Company on the magic items sold at the Founding Festival, didn’t they? I hear they’ve been expanding their influence as of late.”

“I figured you’d know something. They were some of the acquaintances I spoke to. I have a personal connection to them from before; they wanted me to pick some magic items.”

When I visited Dinome, he asked how he could thank me for the music boxes, since they were making him a fortune. I asked him to develop a clock with an alarm function, but to my surprise, they already had one in the back of the store. It was made before I even ordered it. They said it was probably my idea, which confused me a little until they mentioned that Serge told them about it. I did remember telling Serge about it when I showed him the music box. But a single new clock was apparently not nearly enough to pay me

back for the fortune they made, so they asked if I wanted anything else.

“But I have everything I’d need for camping and such already, and none of it is broken or anything, so I couldn’t think of anything I would need. I got that list of magic items from them, so if you see anything on there that the laundromat could use, just tell me and I can get it.”

“How many could we ask for?”

“He just said to ask for everything we’d want. I figure that if we ask for too much, they’ll tell us about it. Besides, if there’s something we really need, I wouldn’t mind buying it ourselves. We have money to spare, don’t we?”

“Yes, we have more than enough capital.”

“Good. If you don’t mind, could you ask the other employees about what they might need? I’ll contact the Lenaf branch to ask them.”

“Understood.”



“Show me too, Carme!” said Jane.

“What’s on there?!” asked Maria.

“If there are any magic items that could help with security, I want that,” said Lilyn.

“Agreed. Not that we need anything, but I would be curious,” said Fay.

All of the employees seemed interested. They passed the list around and mentioned magic items that drew their attention.

“I’ve heard of these ‘stoves’ before. I’ve never used one, but they’re supposed to make it very easy to adjust heat. I’d love to try one if I could. There are plenty of other rare cooking tools here too.”

“I knew you’d want those, Chelma. You do cook every day, after all. But I might like to try it out myself.”

“It’s starting to get cold out, so maybe some sort of heater would be good.”

“A magic item could save time on collecting firewood.”

“Dolce, you don’t have to collect firewood for use here. We’ll buy it. Still, a magic item could potentially save us some money. We’ll have to look into that and see if there’s anything good.”

The discussion took place over a warm and lively meal. Once dinner was over, Carme told me that he had a few reports to give and that I should come to the office. I guess I came back to work at a bad time, so I was forcing him to work overtime.

“I’m sorry,” I said.

“I would hardly consider this overtime. The first report is about

the formal wear you ordered the other day. The tailor informed us that your clothes will be done in three days. You'll be able to pick them up at any time after that."

I thought that was pretty fast, but it was only the suit that would be done by then. The necktie pin wouldn't be finished for another week. Either way, that was still fairly quick.

"I did ask them to try and make it fast. Now you should get them with plenty of time to spare before the visit to the duke's estate. The tailors say they will try to make something worthy of the jewel you provided."

"Sounds like they're enthusiastic about it," I said, stating my honest impressions.

"They've decided that you're a valuable customer, I'm sure," Carme replied with a light smile. "By the way, I suggest you take Fay along as a bodyguard when you go to visit."

"Why? I don't doubt his abilities, but will I need him?"

"It's not for safety. It's more of a formality."

Maybe the type of people the duke's family would introduce me to were the type who always kept servants around. That made sense.

"What about you, Carme?"

"I can't leave the store, but I'll teach you the proper etiquette before you depart."

"I see. Will the store's security be fine without Fay?"

"I would actually like to hire another security guard just in case."

"In that case, shall I ask for someone through the adventurer's guild like last time?"

"That would work, but what about hiring a professional security guard? Under my sister's guidance in Lenaf, Caulkin's team has been learning how to run a business quite admirably. When the time comes that they can be entrusted with new branch stores, we'll want trustworthy security guards for them to hire. This may be a good opportunity to start looking."

I had heard before that Caulkin's team was performing well, to the point that we considered giving them a new branch to run as early as next year. There would be a lot of other staff to hire when that happened, so this was a chance to hire some people early and see if they could be trusted, as well as teach them to work the job.

"Then we can do that. In any case, protecting the laundromat should be a top priority," I said.

"Understood. That's all for the reports, but next, you have a private message from Caulkin's team. It seems they've made new discoveries regarding slime research, and they have a proposal."

"Really?!"

"They made two discoveries, both about applications of cleaner

slimes.” I was on the edge of my seat already. “First, Lobelia researched the beautifying effects of cleaner slimes. She had one clean her before bed every night and noticed that her skin had improved. She then asked employees to help with experiments and offered full body washes to customers, and confirmed her findings. It seems to be especially effective against acne. Is something wrong, Boss?”

“I’m fine, I just never thought of that.”

Beauty wasn’t something I spent much time thinking about, but that did sound helpful. Cleaner slimes enjoyed eating filth, but when washing the body, that presumably included dead skin and old keratin. And acne is caused by excess sebum that builds up in pores. If all of that were removed, it would help maintain healthy skin. That would have beautifying effects, I guess.

“The details are all in this document.”

“Thank you. I’ll send them a letter containing my thoughts later. What’s the other discovery?”

“Tony discovered another use for cleaner slimes. Considering how they could clean filth from clothes after washing them and not leave any moisture, he had the idea to make them clean the writing off of documents when something was miswritten. They could clean all ink off the paper so it could be used again. Writing mistakes are inevitable, especially when someone is new to the job, so this discovery could prove to save on future expenses. A little caution will be necessary, however.”

This was another blind spot for me. It was a simple enough idea, but I never even thought of it. “Can we pay them a bonus for these discoveries?” I asked.

“Slime research isn’t their job, but I do think their findings will be of value to our business. I agree that they deserve a bonus, but how much?”

At my company in my past life, bonuses were a month’s worth of pay at most. “How much is their income, again?”

“They’re still training to be managers, so they currently make 150 sute per day.”

If so, then working six days a week earned them around three thousand six hundred to four thousand sute per month. But this seemed like it could be helpful to our business, so I wanted to be sure they kept up the good work. About three months’ worth of pay sounded good to cover both bonuses and research funding. I suggested offering ten thousand sute to each of them.

“I was thinking about paying around two months’ worth of their income, but our sales are exceeding expectations and we can consider this an investment for the future. If we’re also using this money to fund research, then I suppose it’s an acceptable amount. I’ll notify

them about it," Carme said.

"Please do."

That was it for the reports. This seemed like a good time, so I decided to consult with him about what I had discussed with the gods. But without actually mentioning the gods or my past life, of course. Either way, his expression gradually darkened like he was opposed to my ideas. I suppressed the urge to ask him about it and awaited his response.

"For the moment, I can't agree with your proposals," he said.

"Particularly when it comes to hiring former felons. I can understand the reasoning behind providing them jobs, but we're still in our first year of business. We're performing favorably enough that we should easily be able to hire as many regular workers as we need. I don't think we have to go out of our way to hire risky personnel. I would at least wait until we have opened more branch stores and set up a more stable foundation."

"I guess you're right," I replied. It was a natural response. I didn't think he would accept the idea right away. He was right to think we should solidify our foundation first.

"So I have a proposal."

"What? A proposal?"

"Yes. I understand how you feel, Boss. To be honest, I think these matters are supposed to be the job of the local government and of the churches. However, I've been here for over half a year, and I've seen the way you work. Your management style is sometimes shocking, but it also makes some sense. It's too soon to implement your proposal, but I wouldn't say there's any sense in objecting to it outright. We can put it in action when we're ready. Essentially, I see no problem with the hiring of former felons as an ultimate objective."

"I thought I would have to push harder, but you accepted that surprisingly easily."

"You were already willing to hire peasant girls with no particular skills and citizens of the slums, and you treat each of them with hospitality. This doesn't come as much surprise at this point. But thanks to you, we have all been able to work together in peace."

"I still think this is an idea we will have to be careful about, but I'm glad you spoke with me about it beforehand, and I'm not so averse to it that I would object outright. Some say that a manager needs not only to turn a profit, but to think about the role they play in society, and I'm sure that seeing your work thus far has made me consider that. But like I said before, we need a stronger foundation before we go through with this. If you would be more proactive about leading us toward that, I believe it will be beneficial to our business."

"I see," I said. Carme seemed to understand my wishes and how I

approached them. He never missed anything. "Thank you. Then what should we start with specifically?"

"What if we tried purchasing slaves?" he suggested. I forgot that was legal here.

"I think I know at least basic knowledge about slaves, but not that much. Can you tell me a bit more about that?"

Carme happily explained. This country had three categories of slaves: poverty slaves, debt slaves, and criminal slaves. Poverty slaves were sold into slavery by either themselves or their families in order to survive or help their relatives. Debt slaves were forced into slave labor if they couldn't pay off a debt by the deadline. Criminal slaves committed a crime and were forced into slavery as punishment.

"Poverty slaves and debt slaves often end up in their positions due to unfortunate accidents, so if we want to both hire more employees and work toward your ideas in the future, I think this may be a place to start. And criminal slaves are also restricted by special spells that prevent them from escaping or hurting others, so they should present a lower risk than former felons.

"While there are some who end up in slavery due to misfortune, there are others who find themselves there as a product of their own actions. Poverty slaves and debt slaves traded their freedom for the bare minimum required to survive. Some, of course, hope to be released from slavery early. We pay relatively well, so I think we can offer them that opportunity."

"I see. Is there anything to watch out for while purchasing slaves?"

"It's illegal to physically abuse them or deprive them of necessities, but you should already meet all the qualifications. It won't be much different from hiring staff through the guild."

"Interesting."

While I was thinking about it, Carme had a question for me. "Do you have problems with slaves?"

"I'd more say I'm just not used to them."

I knew that slavery existed in this world, but never had any desire to buy slaves myself. But much of what Carme said was convincing. They were normal in this world, and this would be a good opportunity to learn about them. I told him my thoughts.

"Then I suggest that you visit the Moulton Slave Trading Company in Gaunago. Mr. Morgan told my sister and I that they were a safe business before we came to work for you. If we need slaves, I think they would be a good place to look."

Gaunago happened to be the city where the Jamil family's estate was located. I could stop by while I was in town. It was so perfect that I had to wonder if Carme had it in mind when he made this

suggestion. I looked at him curiously, but he just kept up the same serene smile. He was certainly a dependable assistant. I was determined to thank Serge for introducing me to him later.

Side Story: Behind the Scenes with the Nobles

~???’s Side~

As Ryoma was thinking about his future, somewhere else, other things were occurring.

“Is that all for today’s plans?”

“Yes, thank you.”

“Is it time for dinner, then? Or a bath?”

“What should we do, Elise? It’s up to you.”

“I’d like to be able to take a nice, long bath. Let’s have dinner first.”

“Understood. One moment, please.”

The maid left the lavishly furnished room, leaving Reinhart and Elise alone. They sighed, exhausted after days of work and dealing with visitors.

“I swear, it’s the same thing every year. Isn’t there anything we can do to improve on this?” said Reinhart.

“I hope so. If it were at least just people coming to say hello, it would be easier,” said Elise.

They knew it was their job, but they were only human. Exhaustion was inevitable. Once nobody else was in the room, they no longer bothered to hide it. They glared at the pile of documents.

“How many of these appeals do you think are legitimate?” Reinhart asked.

“Oh, I don’t know, 70%. That’s my optimistic guess.”

“What a pain.”

The documents were all appeals from nobles they knew, and most of them were loan requests.

“I think this is suspicious, at least,” Elise said.

“Let me see. Oh, this? What they really want is money they can show off with, I suspect.”

“And here’s this proposal again. How many times have we gotten this now? This person is so wasteful with money.”

It was almost socializing season, an important time for nobles. They held parties every night to meet others and deepen their relations. And if they didn’t want to embarrass themselves at these events, they needed to spend a fortune. It was so costly that some

noble families spent the rest of the year living as frugally as commoners, if not more. A family went bankrupt every few years from trying too hard to improve their social standing and overspending. And now that it was the end of the year and socializing season was about to start, an increasing number of nobles were secretly requesting loans from more financially stable families.

“I’d like to reject this one, but I’m not so sure,” Reinhart said, reserving his judgment. There was a reason he couldn’t easily dismiss it.

“Most of the rest also say they want funding for defenses against monsters, don’t they?”

“They sure found themselves an annoying excuse.”

If they wanted funding to protect their cities and population from monster attacks, there was some sense to that. They had to approach loan requests from the nobles under their command with particular caution. If they responded poorly, their reputation among nobles could drop. The Jamil family had a fair amount of influence, but they stood nothing to gain from provoking anger. And it was unfortunately true that over the last few years, there was an increase in monster attacks throughout the country. As such, they couldn’t dismiss all of the appeals as excuses, so first they had to gather information and judge it carefully.



“Oh right, isn’t Ryoma coming soon?” Reinhart asked.

“Why do you bring that up?”

“The monster increase started three years ago, didn’t it? I just remember that was around when he said he started living in the forest, that’s all.”

“Now that you mention it, you might be right. It’s amazing he was able to leave his home at all.”

“That’s true. Apparently he’s going back to that forest full of monsters he came from. Do you think he’ll be alright? I guess it was always full of monsters, so maybe it doesn’t matter.”

“From what reports have told me, it seems like he’s doing fine in the city. I don’t see why he has to put himself in danger like that.”

“I don’t want him to do anything dangerous either, but he can make his own decisions. He’s plenty powerful anyway.”

“I know that, I’m just worried. And he must be lonely now that Elia’s off at school.”

Reinhart wryly smiled and said, “He’ll be fine. Ryoma knows what he’s doing, and he has allies. And even Elia has made friends thanks to Ryoma, apparently.”

“You’re right, they won’t be children forever. But I just can’t change how I feel. If your father were here, I’d ask him to go check on them.”

“You had better not leave too,” Reinhart said with a frown. “It would have been easier if Dad had been nice enough to leave Sebas behind, but he just had to take him along.”

“‘Elia is away at school, you shouldn’t need the extra help anymore,’ isn’t that what he said?” Elise asked with a chuckle. “He was gone in a flash. That was a surprise.”

“He did a good job ditching, I’ll give him that. Yeesh.”

As the discussion shifted to the topic of their family, the mood lightened up. Then the maid returned.

“Dinner is ready,” she said.

“Got it, we’ll be right there,” Reinhart replied.

“Did something happen? You two look more cheerful than when I left.”

“We just chatted. It helped us relax a bit.”

“Yes, that,” Elise said. “I’d like to get ready to have a guest stay with us soon, if you can prepare the room.”

“As you wish,” the maid answered.

“And don’t forget the other preparations. A lot is happening at once, so I’m sure it will be difficult, though.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t forget. We care for our colleagues as well.”

Satisfied with the maid’s firm response, Reinhart and Elise began

to walk to the dining hall, but then they were interrupted by another maid. She was holding a letter.

“I believe this just arrived,” she said.

“Who is it from?” Reinhart asked and checked the name on the envelope. He instantly turned glum. “Another one,” he said.

“I just wish we could go check on Elia.”

“We’ll just have to wait. For now, let’s have dinner.”

Reinbach, their competent butler, and the daughter who brought so much joy to their lives were all away. Their hardships would continue for some time.

Extra Story: An Acquaintance of an Acquaintance and Takebayashi's Bad Habit

~Tabuchi's Side~

"Excuse me."

"Oh, hello, Landlady. This way, please."

I didn't know why I was here.

"It's been awfully cold lately. Hm? Aren't you Tabuchi?"

"Oh, yes, hello."

"What? Did this person ask you to come too?"

"No, Tabuchi just happened to run into me. Isn't that right, Tabuchi?"

"Yes..."

After I missed my train stop and fled from the young video producer, I ended up here. To sum it all up, it was a pretty idiotic series of events. I happened to encounter Urami, who invited me up to this room.

"You seem pretty tired," Urami said. "I was going to ask the landlady for her story, but I was wondering if you'd like to give me your story too."

"Well, I can understand why you wouldn't be too chipper," the landlady said. "Do you mind, Tabuchi? He's a reporter from some magazine."

After we entered this room and he introduced himself again, I learned that Urami was a reporter for the magazine that had published the most articles exposing my company's scandals. He was the writer of those articles, in fact. Normally, I wouldn't want to needlessly answer questions for a reporter. But this wasn't a normal time.

"Sure, why not," I said. "Seems like the company is going to hold an official interview tonight anyway, so there's no use hiding anything now." But I didn't have the energy to get out of my chair.

"I probably can't guarantee you have nothing to worry about, but let me tell you this," Urami said. "You can just talk to me off the record. I would appreciate it if you gave me material I could write about, and I'd be lying if I said I didn't hope for that. But as I've pursued this story, I've become more curious about what kind of

person Takebayashi was. I'm mostly here right now for personal reasons."

"If Tabuchi is for it, then I'm open to talking," the landlady said.

"So what do you want to ask about?" I asked.

"Just tell me anything, really. About how Takebayashi was in his day-to-day life, or about memories with him, anything of that sort. Oh, I'll get some drinks and something to eat while we talk."

Urami grabbed a few cans of beer and a convenience store bag full of snacks from the kitchen. I ended up accepting his request, but I didn't even know what to talk about.

"By the way, were you close with Takebayashi, Urami?" I asked.

"Oh, not as much as you two, I don't think. I did live next door, so I've met him, but I always get home at different times due to my job. I think I first met him when I moved in. I saw him outside the door, and he welcomed me to the building. I believe he had also cooked too much dinner and given me a whole bunch of his spare curry. Later on, I would come home from work and sometimes see a plastic container full of food hanging from my doorknob, and I would return the favor with souvenirs from places I went to for work. I hardly ever met him in person, but we did have that kind of relationship."

That reminded me of something. Takebayashi would sometimes bring pastries from different tourist sites to work for no particular occasion. He always said they were given to him, so maybe those came from Urami. He even brought home-cooked food sometimes. That was especially nice to have when I began to live alone.

"I got food from him too," the landlady said. "He gave me a recipe for croquettes, and in return I taught him a recipe for stew."

"Yeah, you only partly mash the potatoes. It makes the croquettes nice and thick."

"You know about it too, Tabuchi? My son's taken quite a liking to them. We used to buy croquettes from the butcher in the neighborhood, but now we make them at home."

Now that we found a shared story to talk about, and we had some alcohol in us, we felt closer with one another and the pace of the conversation picked up.

"So, you knew Takebayashi longer than either of us, right, Landlady?"

"I suppose so. More than ten years, I think. I met him a while back. He was still young at the time, and he moved in with his mom."

"Huh. What was he like back then?"

"Well, he looked younger. Other than that, he didn't change much over time. He was just a bit gloomy, if I had to say."

That was hard to imagine. At work and elsewhere, Takebayashi always said that he was doing fine.

“At the time, he’d fought these convenience store muggers and caused quite a stir. The weekly magazines were calling him a killer and saying what he did was unjustified, so he tried to escape them by moving here. You didn’t know that?”

“I remember hearing that something happened to him, but I don’t know much about it. Is that what happened? I don’t remember any news like that.”

“Well, you’re still young, Tabuchi. You were probably a kid at the time. I was on edge around him myself for a while. I planned to evict him if he ever caused trouble. But he turned out to be an ordinary young man helping his mother as he looked for a job. Now that I think back on him, I’m ashamed that I bought into the news so much. He eventually got past the negative rumors and found a job, but then his mother passed away. Takebayashi was a good man, but he had no luck at all,” the landlady muttered.

I had to agree. It seemed like misfortune had followed him wherever he went.

“Unlucky?”

“Urami? Is something wrong?”

“Well, as I’ve investigated Takebayashi, I’ve discovered a lot of strange things that surrounded him. The incident with the muggers, for example, I learned about shortly after finding his body. I asked my coworkers who had connections within the police force to look into that incident, and they confirmed that Takebayashi stopped some muggers, it was reported on the news, and he was held in custody by the police, but they couldn’t confirm much about why any of this happened.”

When I asked him to explain what he meant, he looked distressed and just said he meant what he meant.

“The documentation from the time was thrown out because it was an old incident, officers who were involved in the case have since passed away, and such. Whenever they got close to any clues, they were out of reach. My coworkers said maybe he was arrested by mistake, so they tried to cover up the evidence. But I’m sure they were joking, of course. Meanwhile, I’ve uncovered countless scandals from his company. It’s all been so easy that it’s almost strange.”

I didn’t know the specifics of what a magazine reporter’s job was, but I could think of something strange myself. “There were a lot of things like that around Takebayashi,” I said.

“Such as?”

“Trains would stop while he was riding them, and when he tried to use a taxi, it’d get stuck in traffic. Things like that happened all the time. I heard about this from people who were at the company longer than me, though.”

This was a story from before I joined the company. It was by no means a big company, but back then they were receiving requests from overseas and receiving employees from countries with rapid growth in information technology. Takebayashi had a lot of stamina, so he was the one who often did the international travel. He had to take planes for this, but there was constant trouble with the planes he bought tickets for. It wasn't so bad when the flights were just late or canceled, but often the issues began after the planes took off.

"The planes never crashed or anything, but the planes he rode had belly landings three to five times in two years. I was told to never get on a plane with Takebayashi."

"I do remember a few years ago when an airline company drew a lot of negative attention for the frequent issues their planes got into."

"There are more stories like that surrounding Takebayashi too. When he had a part-time job in high school, those businesses would have mass layoffs or go bankrupt or so forth, so he lost his job just when he learned what to do."

"Yes, a strange amount of bad luck surrounded him," the landlady agreed.

Now that I thought about it, it was almost like Takebayashi was cursed.

"Well, sometimes he had it coming."

"What do you mean? Can you tell me about that?"

"Well, sometimes people can be stupidly honest, you know. I think you can imagine that. Takebayashi was a good person, but I think he brought some things on himself," I said.

Whenever there were employees who seemed sick, he would do their work for them. He would do the same when somebody wanted to take the day off for a wedding anniversary or other such events. The deadlines for this work were clearly unreasonable, but he pushed himself to meet them with his superhuman stamina and focus. He said he'd be fine because he was strong, every single time. He did several times more work than everyone else.

"Maybe this is rude to say, but I don't think Takebayashi was that incredible at the job, or much of a genius or anything. He just never got tired, so he could work efficiently nonstop."

Takebayashi wasn't lying, for better or worse. He really did have enough stamina, and even when much of the company caught the flu, he was fine. For all the work he took upon himself, he didn't look any more fatigued than everyone else, and we took advantage of him. Maybe he didn't realize it himself, but I think he was doing more than he could take.

"Mind if I have another beer?"

"Go ahead."

I opened another can and poured the cold nectar down my throat. My next words came from the depths of my stomach. "He always just said he'd be fine. Not just when it came to work, but when we were drinking too."

Some people in our department would flake out after a single cup of beer. That wasn't true of me, but I couldn't hold my liquor too well either. But when the boss was making us drink, Takebayashi would drink for us. And when any violence came about, he was the one who took the brunt of it.

"This is also something I just heard from older employees, but our company technically has a labor union, albeit in name only."

Our company claimed to be ethical on the surface by presenting this labor union, but it was controlled by people with strong ties to the CEO and executives. They never did anything to help employees and had no right to hold negotiations. But if someone did ask them to negotiate, they would report to the upper brass, and depending on what they asked for, the employee who made the request could be punished for reasons claimed to be unrelated. They didn't exist to help workers, but as a trap for dissatisfied employees.

Takebayashi knew it was a trap, but still asked for improved conditions. From what I heard, his coworkers at the time were breaking down from overwork. They didn't dare to say anything, so he took it upon himself to speak for them, whether it was a trap or not. And of course, he said that he was fine with whatever became of him.

"He didn't get fired in the end, but conditions obviously didn't improve, and they sort of made an example of him. The boss and others who were around at the time would call him a traitor. Takebayashi was shrewd in some ways, but clumsy in others. He cared about others, but not so much about himself."

Both at work and in my private life, he helped a lot. That went for everyone in our department.

"But he could have lived his life a bit more carefully."

"Yes! Landlady, that's absolutely right. He was durable in both body and mind, he could tolerate minor problems, he would push himself to climb over every wall in his way even when he could have walked around them, that's just how he was. Well, the clients I inherited from him say that's why they trusted him, though."

"I see," Urami said, bringing more beer.

Maybe it was because he was a magazine reporter, but he knew how to get people talking. Each time I answered a question, it felt like a weight was lifted from me. These two were mostly strangers, but I just wanted to keep telling stories. It was just like when I would tell Takebayashi about my own issues.

Afterword

Hello, this is Roy, the author of *By the Grace of the Gods*! Thank you so much for purchasing *By the Grace of the Gods Vol. 6*! I think the mood of this volume was a bit different, but I hope you enjoyed it.

In college, I knew a smart guy who said he always reads the afterword first because it helped him remember the book's contents better that way. But I think most readers start with the table of contents or the story itself, and read this last, so I write the afterword with that in mind. That said, what do you prefer? I can only imagine your answers, but I just hope that I can communicate what I want and that you find it fun and interesting.

I'm in my second year of being an author, and already the manga version of *By the Grace of the Gods* was one of the isekai stories that placed highest in the 'Zenkoku Shotenin ga Osusume Comic 2019' poll of Japanese bookstore employees. I greatly appreciate the praise. But my editor does frequently consult with me about how I write and what I write about, so I still feel inexperienced sometimes.

As long as I'm making money off this, though, I'll keep trying to produce higher quality work and being creative. Sometimes I'll succeed, and sometimes I'll fail. The advice from my editor and the support of my readers keep me going. I'll keep trying to entertain as many of you as I can. And to everyone who helps with the writing, printing, and sales of these books, let me take this time to thank you. See you all in the next volume.

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By the Grace of the Gods: Volume 6
by Roy

Translated by Noah Rozenberg
Edited by Nathan Redmond

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